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THE
PHILOSOPHIC GRAMMAR
—OF—
AMERICAN LANGUAGES,

As Set Forth by Wilhelm von Humboldt ;

WITH THE TRANSLATION OF AN UNPUBLISHED MEMOIR BY
HIM ON THE AMERICAN VERB.

—BY—

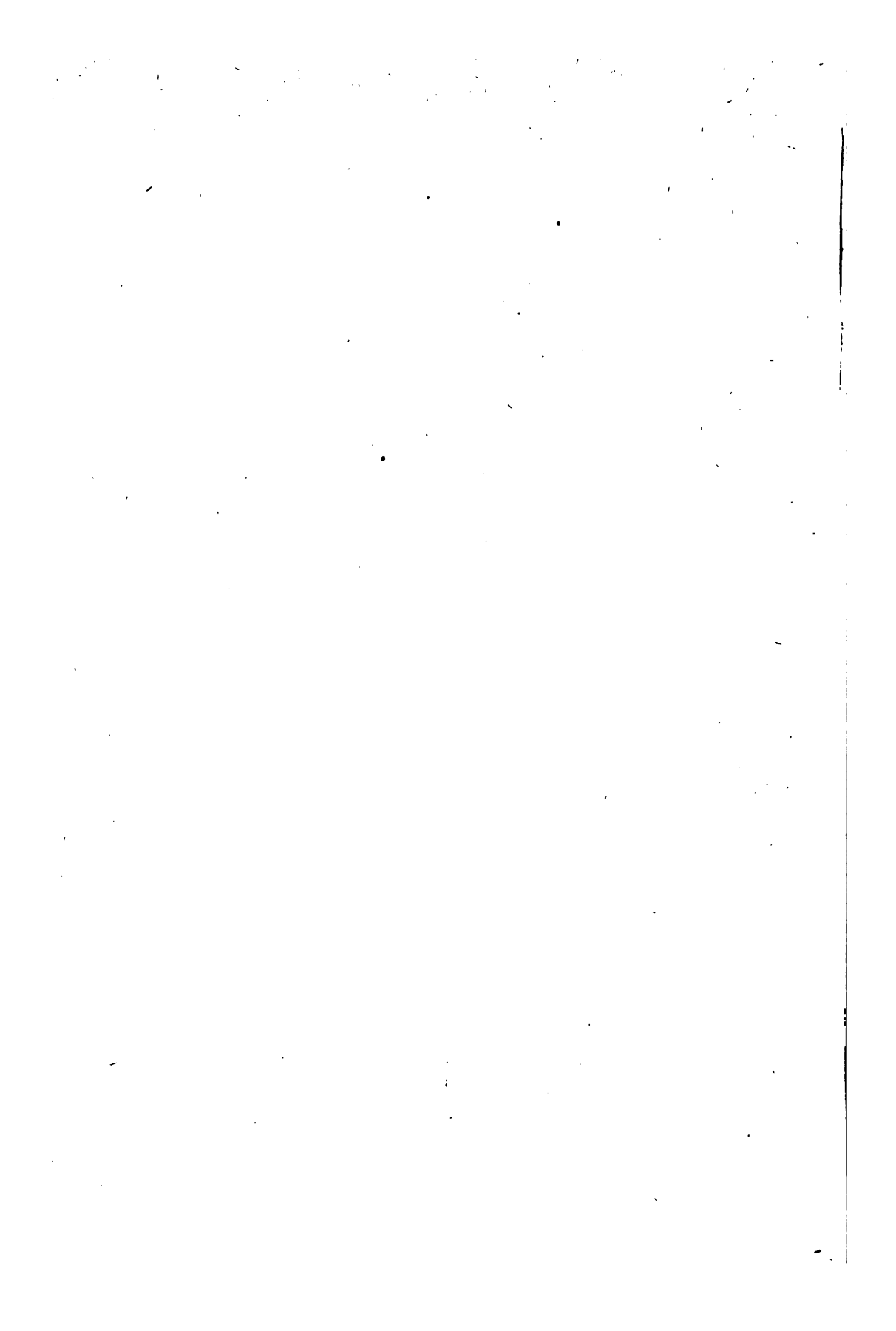
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The Philosophic Grammar of American Languages.

§ 1. INTRODUCTORY.

The foundations of the Philosophy of Language were laid by Wilhelm von Humboldt (b. June 22, 1767, d. April 8, 1835). The principles he advocated have frequently been misunderstood, and some of them have been modified, or even controverted, by more extended research; but a careful survey of the tendencies of modern thought in this field will show that the philosophic scheme of the nature and growth of languages, which he set forth, is gradually reasserting its sway, after having been neglected and denied through the preponderance of the so-called naturalistic school during the last quarter of a century.

The time seems ripe, therefore, to bring the general principles of his philosophy to the knowledge of American scholars, especially as applied by himself to the analysis of American languages.

Any one at all acquainted with Humboldt's writings, and the literature to which they have given rise, will recognize that this is a serious task. I have felt it such, and have prepared myself for it not only by a careful perusal of his own published writings, but also by a comparison of the conflicting interpretations put upon them by Dr. Max Schasler,* Prof. H. Steinthal,† Prof. C. J. Adler,‡ and others, as well as by obtaining a copy of an entirely unpublished memoir by Humboldt on the "American

* *Die Elemente der Philosophischen Sprachwissenschaft Wilhelm von Humboldt's. In systematischer Entwicklung dargestellt und kritisch erläutert*, von Dr. Max Schasler, Berlin, 1847.

† *Die Sprachwissenschaft Wilhelm von Humboldt's und die Hegel'sche Philosophie*, von H. Steinthal, Dr., Berlin, 1848. The same eminent linguist treats especially of Humboldt's teachings in *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie, ihre Principien und ihr Verhältniss zu einander*, pp. 123-135 (Berlin, 1855); in his well-known volume *Charakteristik der Hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues*, pp. 20-70 (Berlin, 1880); in his recent oration *Ueber Wilhelm von Humboldt* (Berlin, 1883); and elsewhere.

‡ *Wilhelm von Humboldt's Linguistical Studies*. By C. J. Adler, A.M. (New York, 1866). This is the only attempt, so far as I know, to present Humboldt's philosophy of language to English readers. It is meritorious, but certainly in some passages Prof. Adler failed to catch Humboldt's meaning.

Verb," a translation of which accompanies this paper. But my chief reliance in solving the obscurities of Humboldt's presentation of his doctrines has been a close comparison of allied passages in his various essays, memoirs and letters. Of these I need scarcely say that I have attached the greatest weight to his latest and monumental work sometimes referred to as his "Introduction to the Kawi Language," but whose proper title is "On Differences in Linguistic Structure, and their Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Race."*

I would not have it understood that I am presenting a complete analysis of Humboldt's linguistic philosophy. This is far beyond the scope of the present paper. It aims to set forth merely enough of his general theories to explain his applications of them to the languages of the American race.

What I have to present can best be characterized as a series of notes on Humboldt's writings, indicating their bearing on the problems of American philology, introducing his theories to students of this branch, and serving as a preface to the hitherto unpublished essay by him on the American Verb, to which I have referred.

§ 2. HUMBOLDT'S STUDIES IN AMERICAN LANGUAGES.

The American languages occupied Humboldt's attention earnestly and for many years. He was first led to their study by his brother Alexander, who presented him with the large linguistic collection he had amassed during his travels in South and North America.

While Prussian Minister in Rome (1802-08), he ransacked the library of the *Collegio Romano* for rare or unpublished works on American tongues; he obtained from the ex-Jesuit Forneri all the information the latter could give about the Yurari, a tongue spoken on the Meta river, New Granada;† and he secured accurate copies of all the manuscript material on these

* *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts*. Prof. Adler translates this "The Structural Differences of Human Speech and their Influence on the Intellectual Development of the Human Race." The word *geistige*, however, includes emotional as well as intellectual things.

† *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., Bd. vi, s. 271, note. I may say, once for all, that my references, unless otherwise stated, are to the edition of Humboldt's *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by his brother, Berlin, 1841-1852.

idioms left by the diligent collector and linguist, the Abbé Hervas.

A few years later, in 1812, we find him writing to his friend Baron Alexander von Rennenkampff, then in St. Petersburg: "I have selected the American languages as the special subject of my investigations. They have the closest relationship of any with the tongues of north-eastern Asia; and I beg you therefore to obtain for me all the dictionaries and grammars of the latter which you can."*

It is probable from this extract that Humboldt was then studying these languages from that limited, ethnographic point of view, from which he wrote his essay on the Basque tongue, the announcement of which appeared, indeed, in that year, 1812, although the work itself was not issued until 1821.

Ten years more of study and reflection taught him a far loftier flight. He came to look upon each language as an organism, all its parts bearing harmonious relations to each other, and standing in a definite connection with the intellectual and emotional development of the nation speaking it. Each language again bears the relation to language in general that the species does to the genus, or the genus to the order, and by a comprehensive process of analysis he hoped to arrive at those fundamental laws of articulate speech which form the Philosophy of Language, and which, as they are also the laws of human thought, at a certain point coincide, he believed, with those of the Philosophy of History.

In the completion of this vast scheme, he continued to attach the utmost importance to the American languages. His illustrations were constantly drawn from them, and they were ever the subject of his earnest studies. He prized them as in certain respects the most valuable of all to the philosophic student of human speech.

Thus, in 1826, he announced before the Berlin Academy that he was preparing an exhaustive work on the "Organism of Language," for which he had selected the American languages exclusively, as best suited for this purpose. "The languages of a great continent," he writes, "peopled by numerous nationali-

* *Aus Wilhelm von Humboldt's letzten Lebensjahren. Eine Mittheilung bisher unbekannter Briefe.* Von Theodor Distel, p. 19 (Leipzig, 1883).

ties, probably never subject to foreign influence, offer for this branch of linguistic study specially favorable material. There are in America as many as thirty little known languages for which we have means of study, each of which is like a new natural species, besides many others whose data are less ample.”*

In his memoir, read two years later, “On the Origin of Grammatical Forms, and their Influence on the Development of Ideas,” he chose most of his examples from the idioms of the New World;† and the year following, he read the monograph on the Verb in American languages, which is printed for the first time with the present essay.

In a later paper, he announced his special study of this group as still in preparation. It was, however, never completed. His earnest desire to reach the fundamental laws of language led him first into a long series of investigations into the systems of recorded speech, phonetic hieroglyphics and alphabetic writing, on which he read memoirs of great acuteness.

In one of these he again mentions his studies of the American tongues, and takes occasion to vindicate them from the current charge of being of a low grade in the linguistic scale. “It is certainly unjust,” he writes, “to call the American languages rude or savage, although their structure is widely different from those perfectly formed.”‡

In 1828, there is a published letter from him making an appointment with the Abbé Thavenet, missionary to the Canadian Algonkins, then in Paris, “to enjoy the pleasure of conversing with him on his interesting studies of the Algonkin language.”|| And a private letter tells us that in 1831 he applied himself with new zeal to mastering the intricacies of Mexican grammar.§

About 1827, he found it indispensable to subject to a critical scrutiny the languages of the great island world of the Pacific

* From his memoir *Ueber das vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung auf die verschiedenen Epochen der Sprachentwicklung*, Bd. iii, s. 249.

† He draws examples from the Carib, Lule, Tupi, Mbaya, Huasteca, Nahuatl, Tamanaca, Abipone, and Mixteca; *Ueber das Entstehen der grammatischen Formen, und ihren Einfluss auf die Ideenentwicklung*, Bd. iii, ss. 269-306.

‡ *Ueber die Buchstabenschrift und ihren Zusammenhang mit dem Sprachbau*, Bd. vi, s. 528.

|| This letter is printed in the memoir of Prof. E. Teza, *Intorno agli Studi del Thavenet sulla Lingua Algonchina*, in the *Annali delle Università toscane*, Tomo xviii (Pisa, 1880).

§ Compare Prof. Adler's Essay, above mentioned, p. 11.

and Indian oceans. This resulted at last in his selecting the Kawi language, a learned idiom of the island of Java, Malayan in origin but with marked traces of Hindu influence, as the point of departure for his generalizations. His conclusions were set forth in the introductory essay above referred to.

The avowed purpose of this essay was to demonstrate the thesis that the *diversity of structure in languages is the necessary condition of the evolution of the human mind*.*

In the establishment of this thesis he begins with a profound analysis of the nature of speech in general, and then proceeds to define the reciprocal influences which thought exerts upon it, it upon thought.

Portions of this work are extremely obscure even to those who are most familiar with his theories and style. This arises partly from the difficulty of the subject; partly because his anxiety to avoid dogmatic statements led him into vagueness of expression; and partly because in some cases he was uncertain of his ground. In spite of these blemishes, this essay remains the most suggestive work ever written on the philosophy of language.

§ 3. THE FINAL PURPOSE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE.

Humboldt has been accused of being a metaphysician, and a scientific idealist.

It is true that he believed in an ideal perfection of language, to wit: that form of expression which would correspond throughout to the highest and clearest thinking. But it is evident from this simple statement that he did not expect to find it in any known or possible tongue. He distinctly says, that this ideal is too hypothetical to be used otherwise than as a stimulus to investigation; but as such it is indispensable to the linguist in the pursuit of his loftiest task—the estimate of the efforts of man to realize perfection of expression.†

* This is found expressed nowhere else so clearly as at the beginning of § 13, where the author writes: "Der Zweck dieser Einleitung, die Sprachen, in der Verschiedenartigkeit ihres Baues, als die nothwendige Grundlage der Fortbildung des menschlichen Geistes darzustellen, und den wechselseitigen Einfluss des Einen auf das Andre zu erörtern, hat mich genöthigt, in die Natur der Sprache überhaupt einzugehen." Bd. vi, s. 106.

† "Der Idee der Sprachvollendung Dasein in der Wirklichkeit zu gewinnen." *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, ss. 10 and 11. The objection which may be urged that a true philosophy of language must deal in universals and not confine itself to mere differentiations (particulars) is neatly met by Dr. Schasler, *Die Elemente der Philosophischen Sprachwissenschaft*, etc., p. 21, note.

There is nothing teleological in his philosophy; he even declines to admit that either the historian or the linguist has a right to set up a theory of progress or evolution; the duty of both is confined to deriving the completed meaning from the facts before them.* He merely insists that as the object of language is the expression of thought, certain forms of language are better adapted to this than others. What these are, why they are so, and how they react on the minds of the nations speaking them, are the questions he undertakes to answer, and which constitute the subject-matter with which the philosophy of language has to do.

Humboldt taught that in its highest sense this philosophy of language is one with the philosophy of history. The science of language misses its purpose unless it seeks its chief end in explaining the intellectual growth of the race.†

Each separate tongue is "a thought-world in tones" established between the minds of those who speak it and the objective world without.‡ Each mirrors in itself the spirit of the nation to which it belongs. But it has also an earlier and independent origin; it is the product of the conceptions of antecedent generations, and thus exerts a formative and directive influence on the national mind, an influence, not slight, but more potent than that which the national mind exerts upon it.||

So also every word has a double character, the one derived from its origin, the other from its history. The former is single, the latter is manifold.§

Were the gigantic task possible to gather from every language the full record of every word and the complete explanation of

* In his remarkable essay "On the Mission of the Historian," which Prof. Adler justly describes as "scarcely anything more than a preliminary to his linguistic researches," Humboldt writes: "Die Philosophie schreibt den Begebenheiten ein Ziel vor; dies Suchen nach Endursachen, man mag sie auch aus dem Wesen des Menschen und der Natur selbst ableiten wollen, stört und verfälscht alle freie Ansicht des eigenthümlichen Wirkens der Kräfte." *Ueber die Aufgabe des Geschichtschreibers*, Bd. 1, s. 13.

† "Das Studium der verschiedenen Sprachen des Erdbodens verfehlt seine Bestimmung, wenn es nicht immer den Gang der geistigen Bildung im Auge behält, und darin seinen eigentlichen Zweck sucht." *Ueber den Zusammenhang der Schrift mit der Sprache*, Bd. vi, s. 428.

‡ "Eine Gedankenwelt an Töne geheftet." *Ueber die Buchstabenschrift und ihre Zusammenhang mit dem Sprachbau*, Bd. vi, s. 530.

|| This cardinal point in Humboldt's philosophy is very clearly set forth in his essay, "Ueber die Aufgabe des Geschichtschreibers," Bd. 1, s. 23, and elsewhere.

§ See *Ueber die Buchstabenschrift*, etc., Bd. vi, s. 530.

each grammatical peculiarity, we should have an infallible, the only infallible and exhaustive, picture of human progress.

§ 4. HISTORICAL, COMPARATIVE AND PHILOSOPHIC GRAMMAR.

The Science of Grammar has three branches, which differ more in the methods they pursue than in the ends at which they aim. These are Historic, Comparative and Philosophic Grammar. Historic Grammar occupies itself with tracing the forms of a language back in time to their earlier expression, and exhibits their development through the archaic specimens of the tongue. Comparative Grammar extends this investigation by including in the survey the similar development of a number of dialects of the same stock or character, and explains the laws of speech, which account for the similarities and diversities observed.

Both of these, it will be observed, begin with the language and its forms, and are confined to these. Philosophic Grammar, on the other hand, proceeds from the universal constructive principles of language, from the abstract formulæ of grammatical relations, and investigates their application in various languages. It looks upon articulate speech as the more or less faithful expression of certain logical procedures, and analyzes tongues in order to exhibit the success, be it greater or less, which attends this effort. The grammatical principles with which it deals are universals, they exist in all minds, although it often happens that they are not portrayed with corresponding clearness in language.*

Philosophic Grammar, therefore, includes in its horizon all languages spoken by men; it essays to analyzè their inmost nature with reference to the laws of thought; it weighs the relations they bear to the character and destiny of those who speak them; and it ascends to the psychological needs and impulses which first gave them existence.

It was grammar in this highest sense, it was the study of lan-

* "Les notions grammaticales resident bien plutôt dans l'esprit de celui qui parle que dans le matériel du langage." Humboldt, *Lettre à M. Abel-Remusat Werke*, Bd. vii, s. 398. On the realms of the three varieties of grammar, see also Dr. M. Schasler, *Die Elemente der Philosophischen Sprachwissenschaft*, etc., s. 85, 86, and Friedrich Müller, *Grundriss der Sprachwissenschaft*, Band 1, ss. 8-10 (Wien, 1878). Schasler observes that a main object in philosophic grammar is an investigation of "die genetisch-qualitativen Unterschiede der Redetheile," that is, of the fundamental psychological differences of the parts of speech, as, what is the ultimate distinction between noun and adjective, etc.?

guages for such lofty purposes as these, with which Humboldt occupied himself with untiring zeal for the last fifteen years of his life, when he had laid aside the cares of the elevated and responsible political positions which he had long filled with distinguished credit.

§ 5. DEFINITION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE.

Humboldt remarks that the first hundred pages or so of his celebrated "Introduction" are little more than an expansion of his definition of language. He gives this definition in its most condensed form as follows: "Language is the ever-recurring effort of the mind to make the articulate sound capable of expressing thought."*

According to this definition, language is not a dead thing, a completed product, but it is an ever-living, active function, an energy of the soul, which will perish only when intelligence itself, in its highest sense, is extinguished. As he expresses it, language is not an *εργον*, but an *ενεργεια*. It is the proof and the product of a mind *consciously* working to a definite end.

Hence, in Humboldt's theory the psychological element of *self-consciousness* lies at the root of all linguistic expression. No mere physical difference between the lower animals and man explains the latter's possession of articulate speech. His self-consciousness alone is that trait which has rendered such a possession possible.†

The idea of Self necessarily implies the idea of Other. A thought is never separate, never isolated, but ever in relation to another thought, suggested by one, leading on to another. Hence, Humboldt says: "The mind can only be conceived as in action, and *as action*."

As Prof. Adler, in his comments on Humboldt's philosophy,

* Steinthal does not like Humboldt's expression "to make capable" (*fähig zu machen*). He objects that the "capacity" to express thought is already in the articulate sounds. But what Humboldt wishes to convey is precisely that this capacity is only derived from the ceaseless, energizing effort of the intellect. Steinthal, *Die Sprachwissenschaft Wilhelm von Humboldt's*, s. 91, note. The words in the original are: "Die sich ewig wiederholende Arbeit des Geistes, den articulirten Laut zum Ausdruck des Gedanken *fähig zu machen*."

† "Nur die Stärke des Selbstbewusstseins nöthigt der körperlichen Natur die scharfe Theilung und feste Begrenzung der Laute ab, die wir Artikulation nennen." *Ueber das Vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung auf die Verschiedenen Epochen der Sprachentwicklung*, Bd. III, s. 244.

admirably observes: "Man does not possess any such thing as an absolutely isolated individuality; the 'I' and the 'thou' are the essential complements of each other, and would, in their last analysis, be found identical."*

On these two fundamental conceptions, those of Identity and Relation, or, as they may be expressed more correctly, those of Being and Action, Humboldt builds his doctrines concerning the primitive radicals of language and the fundamental categories of grammar.

§ 6. PRIMITIVE ROOTS AND GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES.

The roots of a language are classified by Humboldt as either *objective* or *subjective*, although he considers this far from an exhaustive scheme.†

The objective roots are usually descriptive, and indicate an origin from a process of mental analysis. They bear the impress of those two attributes which characterize every thought, Being and Action. Every complete objective word must express these two notions. Upon them are founded the fundamental grammatical categories of the Noun and the Verb; or to speak more accurately, they lead to the distinction of nominal and verbal themes.

The characteristic of the Noun is that it expresses Being; of the Verb that it expresses Action. This distinction is far from absolute in the word itself; in many languages, especially in Chinese and some American languages, there is in the word no discrimination between its verbal and nominal forms; but the verbal or nominal *value* of the word is clearly fixed by other means.‡

Another class of objective root-words are the adjective words, or Determinatives. They are a later accession to the list, and by their addition bring the three chief grammatical categories, the Noun, the Verb and the Adjective, into correlation with the three logical categories of Substance, Action and Quality.

* Ubi suprà, p. 17. Compare Humboldt's words, "Im Ich aber ist von selbst auch das Du gegeben." *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., Bd. vi, s. 115.

† *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., Bd. vi, s. 118; and compare Dr. Schasler's discussion of this subject (which is one of the best parts of his book), *Die Elemente der Phil. Sprachwissenschaft*, etc., ss. 202-14.

‡ Expressed in detail by Humboldt in his *Lettre à M. Abel-Remusat sur la nature des formes grammaticales*, etc., Bd. vii, ss. 300-303.

By the subjective roots, Humboldt meant the personal pronouns. To these he attributed great importance in the development of language, and especially of American languages. They carry with them the mark of sharp individuality, and express in its highest reality the notion of Being.

It is not easy to understand Humboldt's theory of the evolution of the personal pronouns. In his various essays he seems to offer conflicting statements. In one of his later papers, he argues that the origin of such subjective nominals is often, perhaps generally, locative. By comparing the personal pronouns with the adverbs of place in a series of languages, he showed that their demonstrative antedated their personal meaning.* With regard to their relative development, he says, in his celebrated "Introduction":

"The first person expresses the individuality of the speaker, who is in immediate contact with external nature, and must distinguish himself from it in his speech. But in the 'I' the 'Thou' is assumed; and from the antithesis thus formed is developed the third person."†

But in his "Notice of the Japanese Grammar of Father Oyan-guren," published in 1826, he points out that infants begin by speaking of themselves in the third person, showing that this comes first in the order of knowledge. It is followed by the second person, which separates one object from others; but as it does so by putting it in conscious antithesis to the speaker, it finally develops the "I."‡

The latter is unquestionably the correct statement so far as the history of language is concerned and the progress of knowledge. I can know myself only through knowing others.

The explanation which reconciles these theories is that the one refers to the order of thought, or logical precedence, the other to the order of expression. Professor Ferrier, in his "Institutes of Metaphysics," has established with much acuteness the thesis that, "What is first in the order of nature is last in the order of knowledge," and this is an instance of that philosophical principle.

* *Ueber die Verwandtschaft der Ortsadverbia mit dem Pronomen in einigen Sprachen*, in the *Abhandlungen der hist.-phil. Classe der Berliner Akad. der Wiss.* 1829.

† *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., Bd. vi, s. 115.

‡ *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. vii, ss. 392-6.

§ 7. FORMAL AND MATERIAL ELEMENTS OF LANGUAGE.

A fundamental distinction in philosophic grammar is that which divides the *formal* from the *material* element of speech. This division arises from the original double nature of each radical, as expressing both Being and Action.

On the one hand, Action involves Relation; it assumes an object and a subject, an agent, a direction of effort, a result of effort; usually also limitations of effort, time and space, and qualifications as to the manner of the effort. In other words, Action is capable of increase or decrease both in extension and intension.

On the other hand, Being is a conception of fixed conditions, and is capable of few or no modifications.

The *formal* elements of a language are those which express Action, or the relation of the ideas; they make up the affixes of conjugations and declensions, the inflections of words; they indicate the parts of speech, the so-called "grammatical categories," found in developed tongues. The *material* elements are the roots or stems expressing the naked ideas, the conceptions of existence apart from relation.

Using the terms in this sense, Humboldt presents the following terse formula, as his definition of Inflection: "*Inflection is the expression of the category in contrast to the definition of the idea.*"* Nothing could be more definitive and lucid than this concise phrase.

The inflectional or formal elements of language are usually derived from words expressing accessory ideas. Generally, they are worn down to single letters or a single syllable, and they usually may be traced back to auxiliary verbs and pronouns.

Often various accessories are found which are not required by the main proposition. This is a common fault in the narratives of ignorant men and in languages and dialects of a lower grade. It is seen in the multiplication of auxiliaries and qualifying particles observed in many American languages, where a vast

* His explanation of inflection is most fully given in his Introductory Essay, *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., § 14, *Gesammelte Werke*, s. 121, sqq. A sharp, but friendly criticism of this central point of his linguistic philosophy may be found in Steinthal, *Charakteristik der hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues*, ss. 58-61. Humboldt certainly appears not only obscure in parts but contradictory.

number of needless accessories are brought into every sentence.

The nature of the relations expressed by inflections may be manifold, and it is one of the tasks of philosophic grammar to analyze and classify them with reference to the direction of mental action they imply.

It is evident that where these relations are varied and numerous, the language gains greatly in picturesqueness and force, and thus reacts with a more stimulating effect on the mind.

§ 8. THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGES.

Humboldt believed that in this respect languages could be divided into three classes, each representing a stage in progressive development.

In the first and lowest stage all the elements are material and significant, and there are no true formal parts of speech.

Next above this is where the elements of relation lose their independent significance *where so used*, but retain it elsewhere. The words are not yet fixed in grammatical categories. There is no distinction between verbs and nouns except in use. The plural conveys the idea of many, but the singular not strictly that of unity.

Highest of all is that condition of language where every word is subject to grammatical law and shows by its form what category it comes under; and where the relational or formal elements convey no hint of anything but this relation. Here, only, does language attain to that specialization of parts where each element subserves its own purpose and no other, and here only does it correspond with clear and connected thinking.

These expressions, however, must not be understood in a genetic sense, as if historically one linguistic class had preceded the other, and led up to it. Humboldt entertained no such view. He distinctly repudiated it. He did not believe in the evolution of languages. The differences of these classes are far more radical than that of sounds and signs; they reach down to the fundamental notions of things. His teaching was that a language without a passive voice, or without a grammatical gender can never acquire one, and consequently it can never perfectly express the conceptions corresponding to these features.*

* See these teachings clearly set forth in his Essay, *Ueber das vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung auf die verschiedenen Epochen der Sprachentwicklung*, Werke, Bd. III, especially, s. 255 and s. 262.

In defining and appraising these inherent and inalienable qualities of languages lies the highest end and aim of linguistic science. This is its true philosophic character, its mission which lifts it above the mere collecting of words and formulating of rules.

If the higher languages did not develop from the lower, how did they arise? Humboldt answered this question fairly, so far as he was concerned. He said, he did not know. Individuals vary exceedingly in their talent for language, and so do nations. He was willing to call it an innate creative genius which endowed our Aryan forefathers with a richly inflected speech; but it was so contrary to the results of his prolonged and profound study of languages to believe, for instance, that a tongue like the Sanscrit could ever be developed from one like the Chinese, that he frankly said that he would rather accept at once the doctrine of those who attribute the different idioms of men to an immediate revelation from God.*

He fully recognized, however, a progress, an organic growth, in human speech, and he expressly names this as a special branch of linguistic investigation.† He lays down that this growth may be from two sources, one the cultivation of a tongue within the nation by enriching its vocabulary, separating and classifying its elements, fixing its expressions, and thus adapting it to wider uses; the second, by forcible amalgamation with another tongue.

The latter exerts always a more profound and often a more beneficial influence. The organism of both tongues may be destroyed, but the dissolvent force is also an organic and vital one, and from the ruins of both constructs a speech of grander plans and with wider views. "The seemingly aimless and confused interminglings of primitive tribes sowed the seed for the flowers of speech and song which flourished in centuries long posterior."

The immediate causes of the improvement of a language through forcible admixture with another, are: that it is obliged to drop all unnecessary accessory elements in a proposition; that the relations of ideas must be expressed by conventional and not significant syllables; and that the limitations of thought imposed

* The eloquent and extraordinary passage in which these opinions are expressed is in his *Lettre à M. Abel-Remusat*, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. vii, ss. 336-7.

† *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. iii, ss. 248, 257.

by the genius of the language are violently broken down, and the mind is thus given wider play for its faculties.

Such influences, however, do not act in accordance with fixed laws of growth. There are no such laws, which are of universal application. The development of the Mongolian or Aryan tongues is not at all that of the American. The goal is one and the same, but the paths to it are infinite. For this reason each group or class of languages must be studied by itself, and its own peculiar developmental laws be ascertained by searching its history.*

With reference to the growth of American languages, it was Humboldt's view that they manifest the utmost refractoriness both to external influence and to internal modifications. They reveal a marvellous tenacity of traditional words and forms, not only in dialects, but even in particular classes of the community, men having different expressions from women, the old from the young, the higher from the lower classes. These are maintained with scrupulous exactitude through generations, and except by the introduction of words, three centuries of daily commingling with the white race, have not at all altered the grammar and scarcely the phonetics of many of their languages.

Nor is this referable to the contrast between an Aryan and an American language. The same immiscibility is shown between themselves. "Even where many radically different languages are located closely together, as in Mexico, I have not found a single example where one exercised a constructive or formative influence on the other. But it is by the encounter of great and contrasted differences that languages gain strength, riches, and completeness. Only thus are the perceptive powers, the imagination and the feelings impelled to enrich and extend the means of expression, which, if left to the labors of the understanding alone, are liable to be but meagre and arid."†

§ 9. INTERNAL FORM OF LANGUAGES.

Besides the grammatical form of a language, Humboldt recognized another which he called its *internal form*. This is that

* This reasoning is developed in the essay, *Ueber das Vergleichende Sprachstudium*, etc., *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. III, ss. 241-268; and see *ibid*, s. 270.

† See the essay *Ueber die Buchstabenschrift und ihren Zusammenhang mit dem Sprachbau*, *Ges. Werke*, Bd. VI, ss. 551-2.

subtle something not expressed in words, which even more than the formal parts of speech, reveals the linguistic genius of a nation. It may be defined as the impression which the language bears of the clearness of the conceptions of those speaking it, and of their native gift of speech. He illustrates it by instancing the absence of a developed mode in Sanscrit, and maintains that in the creators of that tongue the conception of modality was never truly felt and distinguished from tense. In this respect its inner form was greatly inferior to the Greek, in the mind of which nation the ideally perfect construction of the verb unfolded itself with far more clearness.

The study of this inner form of a language belongs to the highest realm of linguistic investigation, and is that which throws the most light on the national character and capacities.*

§ 10. CRITERIA OF RANK IN LANGUAGES.

Humboldt's one criterion of a language was its tendency to *quicken and stimulate mental action*. He maintained that this is secured just in proportion as the grammatical structure favors clear definition of the individual idea apart from its relations, in other words, as it separates the material from the inflectional elements of speech. Clear thinking, he argued, means progressive thinking. Therefore he assigned a lower position both to those tongues which inseparably connect the idea with its relations, as the American languages, and to those which, like the Chinese and in a less degree the modern English, have scarcely any formal elements at all, but depend upon the position of words (placement) to signify their relations.

But he greatly modified this unfavorable judgment by several extenuating considerations.

Thus he warns us that it is of importance to recognize fully "that grammatical principles dwell rather in the mind of the speaker than in the material and mechanism of his language."†

This led him to establish a distinction between *explicit* grammar, where the relations are fully expressed in speech, and *im-*

* On this subtle point, which has been by no means the least difficult to his commentators, see Humboldt's Introduction *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., *Ges. Werke*, Bd. vi, ss. 45-6, 92-5, 254-5, by a careful comparison of which passages his real intent will become apparent.

† *Lettre à M. Abbe-Remusat*, *Ges. Werke*, Bd. vii, s. 396.

plicit grammar, where they are wholly or in part left to be understood by the mind.

He expressly and repeatedly states that an intelligent thinker, trained in the grammatical distinctions of a higher language, can express any thought he has in the grammar of any other tongue which he masters, no matter how rude it is. This adaptability lies in the nature of speech in general. A language is an instrument, the use of which depends entirely on the skill of him who handles it. It is doubtful whether such imported forms and thoughts appeal in any direct sense to those who are native to the tongue. But the fact remains that the forms of the most barbarous languages are such that they may be developed to admit the expression of any kind of idea.

But the meaning of this must not be misconstrued. If languages were merely dead instruments which we use to work with, then one would be as good as another to him who had learned it. But this is not the case. Speech is a living, physiological function, and, like any other function, is most invigorating and vitalizing when it works in the utmost harmony with the other functions. Its special relationship is to that brain-action which we call thinking; and entire harmony between the two is only present when the form, structure and sounds of speech correspond accurately to the logical procedure of thought. This he considered "an undeniable fact."

The measure of the excellence of a language, therefore, is the clearness, definiteness and energy of the ideas which it awakes in the nation. Does it inspire and incite their mind? Has it positive and clear tones, and do these define sharply the ideas they represent, without needless accessories? Does its structure present the leading elements of the proposition in their simplicity, and permit the secondary elements to be grouped around them in subordinate positions, with a correct sense of linguistic perspective? The answers to these queries decide its position in the hierarchy of tongues.*

* "Nicht was in einer Sprache ausgedrückt zu werden vermag, sondern das, wozu sie aus eigner, innerer Kraft anfeuert und begeistert, entscheidet über ihre Vorzüge oder Mängel." *Ueber das Entstehen der Grammatischen Formen*, etc., *Werke*, Bd. III, s. 273. Compare with this the expression in his celebrated *Einführung*: "Die Sprache ist das bildende Organ des Gedanken," *Werke*, Bd. VI, s. 51. A perfected language will "allseitig und harmonisch durch sich selbst auf den Geist einwirken." *Ibid*, s. 311,

As its capacity for expression is no criterion of a language, still less is the abundance or regularity of its forms. For this very multiplicity, this excessive superfluity, is a burden and a drawback, and obscures the integration of the thought by attaching to it a quantity of needless qualifications. Thus, in the language of the Abipones, the pronoun is different as the person spoken of is conceived as present, absent, sitting, walking, lying, or running, all quite unnecessary specifications.*

In some languages much appears as form which, on close scrutiny, is nothing of the kind.

This misunderstanding has reigned almost universally in the treatment of American tongues. The grammars which have been written upon them proceed generally on the principles of Latin, and apply a series of grammatical names to the forms explained, entirely inappropriate to them and misleading. Our first duty in taking up such a grammar as, for instance, that of an American language, is to dismiss the whole of the arrangement of the "parts of speech," and, by an analysis of words and phrases, to ascertain by what arrangement of elements they express logical, significant relations.†

For example, in the Carib tongue, the grammars give *aveiridaco* as the second person singular, subjunctive imperfect, "if thou wert." Analyze this, and we discover that *a* is the possessive pronoun "thy;" *veiri* is "to be" or "being" (in a place); and *daco* is a particle of definite time. Hence, the literal rendering is "on the day of thy being." The so-called imperfect subjunctive turns out to be a verbal noun with a preposition. In many American languages the hypothetical supposition expressed in the Latin subjunctive is indicated by the same circumlocution.

Again, the infinitive, in its classical sense, is unknown in most, probably in all, American languages. In the Tupi of Brazil and frequently elsewhere it is simply a noun; *caru* is both "to eat"

* *Ueber das Entstehen der grammatischen Formen*, etc., *Werke*, Bd. iii, s. 292.

† Speaking of such "imperfect" languages, he gives the following wise suggestion for their study: "Ihr einfaches Geheimniss, welches den Weg anzeigt, auf welchem man sie, mit gänzlicher Vergessenheit unserer Grammatik, immer zuerst zu enträthseln versuchen muss, ist, das in sich Bedeutende unmittelbar an einander zu reihen." *Ueber das Vergleichende Sprachstudium*, etc., *Werke*, Bd. iii, s. 255; and for a practical illustration of his method, see the essay, *Ueber das Entstehen der grammatischen Formen*, etc., Bd. iii, s. 274.

and "food;" *che caru ai-pota*, "I wish to eat," literally "my food I wish."

In the Mexican, the infinitive is incorporated in the verb as an accusative, and the verb is put in the future of the person spoken of.

Many writers continue to maintain that a criterion of rank of a language is its lexicographical richness—the number of words it possesses. Even very recently, Prof. Max Müller has applied such a test to American languages, and, finding that one of the Fuegian dialects is reported to have nearly thirty thousand words, he maintains that this is a proof that these savages are a degenerate remnant of some much more highly developed ancestry. Founding his opinion largely on similar facts, Alexander von Humboldt applied the expression to the American nations that they are "*des débris échappés à un naufrage commun.*"

Such, however, was not the opinion of his brother Wilhelm. He sounded the depths of linguistic philosophy far more deeply than to accept mere abundance of words as proof of richness in a language. Many savage languages have twenty words signifying to eat particular things, but no word meaning "to eat" in general; the Eskimo language has different words for fishing for each kind of fish, but no word "to fish," in a general sense. Such apparent richness is, in fact, actual poverty.

Humboldt taught that the quality, not merely the quantity, of words was the decisive measure of verbal wealth. Such quality depends on the relations of concrete words, on the one hand, to the primitive objective perceptions at their root, and, on the other, to the abstract general ideas of which they are particular representatives; and besides this, on the relations which the spoken word, the articulate sound, bears to the philosophic laws of the formation of language in general.*

In his letter to Abel-Remusat he discusses the theory that the American languages point to a once higher condition of civilization, and are the corrupted idioms of deteriorated races. He denies that there is linguistic evidence of any such theory. These

* His teachings on this point, of which I give the barest outline, are developed in sections 12 and 13 of his Introduction, *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc. Steintal's critical remarks on these sections (in his *Charakteristik der haupt. Typen des Sprachbaues*) seem to me unsatisfactory, and he even does not appear to grasp the chain of Humboldt's reasoning.

languages, he says, possess a remarkable regularity of structure, and very few anomalies. Their grammar does not present any visible traces of corrupting intermixtures.*

In a later work he returns to the subject when speaking of the Lenape (Algonkin Delaware) dialect, and asks whether the rich imaginative power, of which it bears the evident impress, does not point to some youthful, supple and vigorous era in the life of language in general?† But he leaves the question unanswered.

§ 11. CLASSIFICATION OF LANGUAGES.

The lower unit of language is the Word; the higher is the Sentence. The plans on which languages combine words into sentences are a basic character of their structure, and divide them into classes as distinct and as decisive of their future, as those of vertebrate and invertebrate animals in natural history.

These plans are four in number:

1. By Isolation.

The words are placed in juxtaposition, without change. Their relations are expressed by their location only (placement). The typical example of this is the Chinese.

2. By Agglutination.

The sentence is formed by suffixing to the word expressive of the main idea a number of others, more or less altered, expressing the relations. Examples of this are the Eskimo of North America, and the Northern Asiatic dialects.

3. By Incorporation.

The leading word of the sentence is divided and the accessory words either included in it or attached to it with abbreviated forms, so that the whole sentence assumes the form and sound of one word.

4. By Inflection.

Each word of the sentence indicates by its own form the character and relation to the main proposition of the idea it represents. Sanscrit, Greek and Latin are familiar examples of inflected tongues.

* *Lettre à M. Abel-Remusat, Werke*, Bd. vii, ss. 353-4.

† *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., Sec. 23, *Werke*, Bd. vi, s. 329.

It is possible to suppose that all four of these forms were developed from some primitive condition of utterance unknown to us, just as naturalists believe that all organic species were developed out of a homogeneous protoplasmic mass; but it is as hard to see, how any one of them in its present form could pass over into another, as to understand how a radiate could change into a mollusk.

§ 12. NATURE OF INCORPORATION.

Of the four plans mentioned, Incorporation is that characteristic of, though not confined to, American tongues.

It may appear in a higher or a lower grade, but its intention is everywhere the effort to convey in one word the whole proposition. The Verb, as that part of speech which especially conveys the synthetic action of the mental operation, is that which is selected as the stem of this word-sentence; all the other parts are subordinate accessories, devoid of syntactic value.

The higher grade of incorporation includes both subject, object and verb in one word, and if for any reason the object is not included, the scheme of the sentence is still maintained in the verb, and the object is placed outside, as in apposition, without case ending, and under a form different from its original and simple one.

This will readily be understood from the following examples from the Mexican language.

The sentence *ni-naca-gua*, is one word and means "I, flesh, eat." If it is desired to express the object independently, the expression becomes *ni-c-qua-in-nacatl*, "I it eat, the flesh." The termination *tl* does not belong to the root of the noun, but is added to show that it is in an external, and, as it were, unnatural position. Both the direct and remote object can thus be incorporated, and if they are not, but separately appended, the scheme of the sentence is still preserved; as *ni-te-tla-maca*, literally, "I, something, to somebody, give." How closely these accessories are incorporated is illustrated by the fact that the tense arguments are not added to the stem, but to the whole word; *o-ni-c-te-maca-e*, "I have given it to somebody;" when the *o* is the prefix of the perfect.

In these languages, every element in the sentence, which is not incorporated in the verb, has, in fact, no syntax at all. The

verbal exhausts all the formal portion of the language. The relations of the other words are intimated by their position. Thus *ni-llagottlaz-nequia*, I wished to love, is literally "I, I shall love, I wished." *Tlagottlaz*, is the first person singular of the future, *ni-nequia*, I wished, which is divided, and the future form inserted. The same expression may stand thus: *ni-c-nequia-tlagottlaz*, where the *c* is an intercalated relative pronoun, and the literal rendering is, "I it wished, I shall love."

In the Lule language the construction with an infinitive is simply that the two verbs follow each other in the same person, as *caic tucuec*, "I am accustomed to eat," literally, "I am accustomed, I eat."

None of these devices fulfills all the uses of the infinitive, and hence they are all inferior to it.

In languages which lack formal elements, the deficiency must be supplied by the mind. Words are merely placed in juxtaposition, and their relationship guessed at. Thus, when a language constructs its cases merely by prefixing prepositions to the unaltered noun, there is no grammatical form; in the Mbaya language *e-tiboa* is translated "through me," but it is really "I, through;" *l'emani*, is rendered "he wishes," but it is strictly "he, wish."

In such languages the same collocation of words often corresponds to quite different meanings, as the precise relation of the thoughts is not defined by any formal elements. This is well illustrated in the Tupi tongue. The word *uba* is "father;" with the pronoun of the third person prefixed it is *tuba*, literally "he, father." This may mean either "his father," or "he is a father," or "he has a father," just as the sense of the rest of the sentence requires.

Certainly a language which thus leaves confounded together ideas so distinct as these, is inferior to one which discriminates them; and this is why the formal elements of a tongue are so important to intellectual growth. The Tupis may be an energetic and skillful people, but with their language they can never take a position as masters in the realm of ideas.

The absence of the passive in most, if not all, American tongues is supplied by similar inadequate collocations of words. In Huasteca, for example, *nana tanin tahjal*, is translated "I

am treated by him ;" actually it is, "I, me, treats he." This is not a passive, but simply the idea of the Ego connected with the idea of another acting upon it.

This is vastly below the level of inflected speech ; for it cannot be too strenuously maintained that the grammatical relations of spoken language are the more perfect and favorable to intellectual growth, the more closely they correspond to the logical relations of thought.

Sometimes what appears as inflection turns out on examination to be merely adjunction. Thus in the Mbaya tongue there are such verbal forms as *daladi*, thou wilt throw, *nilabuute*, he has spun, when the *d* is the sign of the future, and the *n* of the perfect. These look like inflections ; but in fact *d*, is simply a relic of *quide*, hereafter, later, and *n* stands in the same relation to *quine*, which means "and also."

To become true formal elements, all such adjuncts must have completely lost their independent signification ; because if they retain it, their material content requires qualification and relation just as any other stem word.

A few American languages may have reached this stage. In the Mexican there are the terminals *ya* or *a* in the imperfect, the augment *o* in the preterit, and others in the future. In the Tamanaca the present ends in *a*, the preterit in *e*, the future in *c*. "There is nothing in either of these tongues to show that these tense signs have independent meaning, and therefore there is no reason why they should not be classed with those of the Greek and Sanscrit as true inflectional elements."*

§ 13. PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF INCORPORATION.

This Incorporative plan, which may be considered as distinctive of the American stock of languages, is explained in its psychological origin by Humboldt, as the result of an *exaltation of the imaginative over the intellectual elements of mind*. By this method, the linguistic faculty strives to present to the understanding the whole thought in the most compact form possible, thus to facilitate its comprehension ; and this it does, because a

* "Der Mexikanischen kann man am Verbum, in welchem die Zeiten durch einzelne Endbuchstaben und zum Theil offenbar symbolisch bezeichnet werden, Flexionen und ein gewisses Streben nach Sanskritischer Wortheinheit nicht absprechen." *Ueber die Verschiedenheit, etc., Werke*, Bd. vi, s. 176.

thought presented in one word is more vivid and stimulating to the imagination, more individual and picturesque, than when narrated in a number of words.*

But the mistake must not be made of supposing that Incorporation is a *creative act* of the language-sense, or that its products, the compounds that it builds, are real words. Humboldt was careful to impress this distinction, and calls such incorporated compounds examples of *collocation* (*Zusammensetzung*), not of *synthesis* (*Zusammenfassung*). On this ground, he doubted, and with justice, the assertion of Duponceau, that the long words of the Lenape (Delaware) dialect are formed by an arbitrary selection of the phonetic parts of a number of words, without reference to the radical syllables.† He insisted, as is really the case, that in all instances the significant syllable or syllables are retained.

§ 14. EFFECT OF INCORPORATION ON COMPOUND SENTENCES.

As has been seen, the theory of Incorporation is to express the whole proposition, as nearly as possible, in one word; and what part of it cannot be thus expressed, is left without any syntax whatever. Not only does this apply to individual words in a sentence, but it extends to the various clauses of a compound sentence, such as in Aryan languages show their relation to the leading clauses by means of prepositions, conjunctions and relative pronouns.

When the methods are analyzed by which the major and minor clauses are assigned their respective values in these tongues, it is very plain what difficulties of expression the system of Incorporation involves. Few of them have any true connecting word of either of the three classes above mentioned. They depend on scarcely veiled material words, simply placed in juxtaposition.

It is probable that the prepositions and conjunctions of all

* "Daher ist das Einschliessen in Ein Wort mehr Sache der Einbildungskraft, die Trennung mehr die des Verstandes." *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., s. 327. Compare also, s. 326 and 186. Steinthal points out the disadvantages of the incorporative plan and puts it lower than the isolating system of the Chinese; but fails to recognize its many and striking advantages. See his remarks, "Ueber das Wesen und Werth der Einverlebungsmethode," in his *Charakteristik der haupt. Typen des Sprachbaues*, s. 214.

† *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., in *Werke*, Bd. vi, ss. 323 sqq.

languages were at first significant words, and the degree to which they have lost their primary significations and have become purely formal elements expressing relation, is one of the measures of the grammatical evolution of a tongue. In most American idioms their origin from substantives is readily recognizable. Frequently these substantives refer to parts of the body, and this, in passing, suggests the antiquity of this class of words and their value in comparison.

In Maya *tan* means in, toward, among; but it is also the breast or front of the body. The Mexican has three classes of prepositions—the first, whose origin from a substantive cannot be detected; the second, where an unknown and a known element are combined; the third, where the substantive is perfectly clear. An example of the last mentioned is *itic*, in, compounded of *ite*, belly, and the locative particle *c*; the phrase *ilhucatl itic*, in heaven, is literally “in the belly of heaven.” Precisely the same is the Cakchiquel *pamcah*, literally, “belly, heaven”—in heaven. In Mexican, *notepotzco* is “behind me,” literally, “my back, at;” this corresponds again to the Cakchiquel *chuih*, behind me, from *chi*, at, *u*, my, *vih*, shoulder-blades. The Mixteca prepositions present the crude nature of their origin without disguise, *chisi huahi*, belly, house—that is, in front of the house; *sata huahi*, back, house—behind the house.

The conjunctions are equally transparent. “And” in Maya is *yetel*, in Mexican *ihuan*. One would suppose that such an indispensable connective would long since have been worn down to an insoluble entity. On the contrary, both these words retain their perfect material meaning. *Yetel* is a compound of *y*, his, *et*, companion, and *el*, the definite termination of nouns. *Ihuan* is the possessive, *i*, and *huan*, associate, companion, used also as a termination to form a certain class of plurals.

The deficiency in true conjunctions and relative pronouns is met in many American languages by a reversal of the plan of expression with us. The relative clause becomes the principal one. There is a certain logical justice in this; for, if we reflect, it will appear evident that the major proposition is, in our construction, presented as one of the conditions of the minor. “I shall drown, if I fall in the water,” means that, of the various results of my falling in the water, one of them will be that I

shall drown. "I followed the road which you described," means that you described a road, and one of the results of this act of yours was that I followed it.

This explains the plan of constructing compound sentences in Quichua. Instead of saying "I shall follow the road which you describe," the construction is "You describe, this road I shall follow;" and instead of "I shall drown if I fall in the water," it would be, "I fall in the water, I shall drown."

The Mexican language introduces the relative clause by the word *in*, which is an article and demonstrative pronoun, or, if the proposition is a conditional one, by *intla*, which really signifies "within this," and conveys the sense that the major is included within the conditions of the minor clause. The Cakchiquel conditional particle is *vuc*, if, which appears to be simply the particle of affirmation "yes," employed to give extension to the minor clause, which, as a rule, is placed first.

Or a conventional arrangement of words may be adopted which will convey the idea of certain dependent clauses, as those expressing similitude, as is often the case in Mexican.

§ 15. THE DUAL IN AMERICAN LANGUAGES.

In his admirable philosophical examination of the dual number in language, Humboldt laid the foundation of a linguistic theory of numerals which has not yet received the development it merits. Here he brings into view the dual and plural endings of a list of American languages, and explains the motives on which they base the inclusive and exclusive plurals so common among them. It is, in fact, a species of pronominal dual confined to the first person in the plural.

This, he goes on to say, is by no means the only dual in these tongues. Some of them express both the other classes of duals which he names. Thus, the Totonaca has duals for all objects which appear as pairs in nature, as the eyes, the ears, the hands, etc.; while the Araucanian equals the Sanscrit in extending the grammatical expression of the dual through all parts of speech where it can find proper application.*

* See the essay, *Ueber den Duals*, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. vi, ss. 562-596.

§ 16. HUMBOLDT'S ESSAY ON THE AMERICAN VERB.

The essay on the American verb translated in the following pages has never previously appeared in print, either in German or English. The original MS. is in the Royal Library at Berlin, whence I obtained a transcript. The author alludes to this essay in several passages of his printed works, most fully in his "Letter to M. Abel-Remusat" (1826), in which he says:

"A few years ago, I read before the Berlin Academy a memoir, which has not been printed, in which I compared a number of American languages with each other, solely with regard to the manner in which they express the verb as uniting the subject with the attribute in the proposition, and from this point of view I assigned them to various classes. As this trait proves to what degree a language possesses grammatical forms, or is near to possessing them, it is decisive of the whole grammar of a tongue."

On reading the memoir, I was so much impressed with the acuteness and justness of its analysis of American verbal forms that I prepared the translation which I now submit.

In the more recent studies of the American verb which have appeared from the pens of Friedrich Müller, J. Hammond Trumbull and Lucien Adam, we have the same central element of speech subjected to critical investigation at able hands. But it seems to me that none of them has approached the topic with the broad, philosophic conceptions which impress the reader in this essay of Humboldt's. Although sixty years and more have elapsed since it was written, I am confident that it will provide ample food for thought to the earnest student of language.

*On the Verb in American Languages. By Wilhelm von Humboldt
Translated from the unpublished original. By D. G. Brinton, M.D.*

You recently had the goodness to give an appreciative hearing to my essay on The Origin of Grammatical Forms.

I desire to-day to apply the principles which I then stated in general to a particular grammatical point through a series of languages. I choose those of America as best suited to such a purpose, and select the Verb as the most important part of speech, and the central point of every language. Without entering into an analysis of the different parts of the verb, I shall confine myself to that which constitutes its peculiar verbal character—the union of the subject and predicate of the sentence by means of the notion of Being. This alone forms the essence of the verb; all other relations, as of persons, tenses, modes and classes, are merely secondary properties.

The question to be answered is therefore :—

Through what form of grammatical notation do the languages under consideration indicate that subject and predicate are to be united by means of the notion of Being ?

I believe I have shown with sufficient clearness that a language may have a great diversity of apparent forms, and may express all grammatical relations with definiteness, and yet when taken as a whole it may lack true grammatical form. From this arises an essential and real graduated difference between languages. This difference, however, has nothing to do with the question whether particular languages employ exclusively agglutination or inflection, as all began with agglutination; but in the languages of the higher class, it became in its effects on the mind, identical with inflection.

As languages of the higher class, one has but to name the cultivated idioms of Asia and Europe, Sanscrit, Greek and Latin, in order to apply to them the above statement. It is still more necessary, however, to understand thoroughly the structure of those languages which are on a lower plane, partly because this will convince us of the correctness of the classification, partly because these tongues are less generally known.

It is enough to take up some single leading grammatical relation. I select for this purpose the verb as the most important part of speech, with which most of the others come into relation, and which completes the formation of the sentence, the grammatical purpose of all language—and often embraces it wholly in itself. But I shall confine myself solely to that which makes the verb a verb, the characteristic notation of its peculiar verbal nature. In every language this point is the most important and the most difficult, and cannot be made too clear to throw light upon the whole of the language. Linguistic character can be ascertained through this point in the shortest and most certain manner.

The verb is the union of the subject and predicate of the sentence by means of the notion of Being; yet not of every predicate. The attribute which is united to the substance by the verb must be an energetic one, a participial. The substance is represented in the verb as in motion, as connecting the Being with the energetic attribute. By means of this representation, and the peculiar nature of the attribute, the verb is distinguished from the mere logical copula, with which it is liable to be confounded if these ideas are not understood. If the verb is explained merely as a synthesis of Being with any other attribute, then the origin of the tenses cannot be wholly derived from one idea, for the idea of time alone would allow only a three-fold distinction. Moreover, in such case the true and efficient nature of the verb is misunderstood. In the sentence, "The man is good," the verb is not a synthesis of the adjective "good" with the substantive, but it is a participial of the energetic attribute "to be good," which contains a condition, having beginning, middle and end, and consequently resembles an action. Fully analyzed, the sentence would be, "He is being-good." Where the substantive verb stands without a visible predicate, as in the sentence, "I am," then the verb "to be" has itself as the object of a synthesis, "I am being." But as rude nations would find this difficult to comprehend, the verb "to be" is either entirely lacking, as in many American languages, or else it has an original material sense, and is confounded with "to stand," "to give," "to eat," etc., and thus indicates Being as identical with the most familiar occupations.

The subject, the substance represented as in action, may be one independent of the speakers, or it may be identical with one of them, and this identity is expressed by the pronouns. From this arises the persons. The energetic attribute may exert its action in various manners in the substance or between two substances; this gives rise to the forms or classes of verbs. Their action must be confined to a given point or period of time. The Being may be understood as definite or indefinite, etc., and in this is the origin of modes. Being is inseparably connected with the notation of time. This, united with the fixation of the point or period of time of an action, forms the tenses. No verb, therefore, can be conceived as without persons and tenses, modes and classes; yet these qualities do not constitute its essence, but arise from the latter, which itself is the synthesis brought about by the notion of Being. The signs of these qualities must be made to appear in the grammatical notation of the verb, but in such a manner that they appear dependent on its nature, making one with it.

The energetic attribute, which aids in forming the verb, may be a real movement or action, as going, coming, living, working, etc., or merely a qualitative Being, as a being beautiful, good, mortal, or immortal. In the former case, we have a real attributive verb, in the latter a substantive verb, in which an attribute is considered as at rest, hence as an adjective. Although in both cases the nature of the verb is the

same, yet in many languages this difference leads to a corresponding variety in grammatical notation.

In accordance with these ideas culled from universal grammar, the forms of the conjugations in the various languages will now be considered.

I have taken as a basis for this investigation as many American languages as I thought sufficient for the purpose, and as would not make the survey oppressive by their number; but as I do not name all of them, and pay still less attention to pointing out in what other groups of languages the peculiarities named occur, it must be understood that what is here said is not intended as a characterization of American languages. This is reserved for another study.

In order to judge how closely these languages approach grammatical perfection in this point, we must take as our criterion that condition of speech where there is a class of words, which possess verbal power, and are at the same time separated by a definite form from all other parts of speech. With reference to this condition as the highest, we must arrange in various grades all other structural forms or paraphrases of the verb.

The notion of Being, which constitutes the basis and the essence of the verb, can be indicated either,

1. As expressed independently.
2. As incorporated in the verbal form as an auxiliary verb.
3. As included in the verbal form merely as an idea.

The differences of the languages under comparison can be appreciated most correctly by means of these three headings; but it must not be forgotten that any language may use the first and one of the last two methods, and that in languages which have a substantive verb conjugated with and without auxiliary verbs, all three may be employed.

I.

WHEN THE NOTION OF BEING IS EXPRESSED INDEPENDENTLY.

I must except from this class all instances where the substantive verb is formed from a radical, inasmuch as this root, like any other, must assume the verbal form, and thus come under one of the two other divisions. In such case it expresses the notion of Being, either by an auxiliary, as in the German *Ich bin gewesen*, or simply in the form, as, *I am*. When it is remembered that the substantive verbs of all languages are derived from concrete conceptions and impart to these merely the general notion of Being, the above becomes still more obvious.

Now if there is no root-form for the substantive verb, and yet it is expressed independently, and not by another verbal form, this can only be done either by the position of the governing and governed words, or by linguistic elements which are not properly verbs, but only become

so by this use. In the former case the substantive verb is merely understood, in the latter it appears in a definite word, but without a fixed radical.

1. *When the notion of Being is understood.*

One of the most common forms of sentences in American languages is to bring together an adjective and a substantive, the substantive verb being omitted.

Mexican: *in Pedro qualli*, the Peter (is) good.

Totonaca: *aquit chixco*, I (am) a man.

Huasteca: *naxe uxum ibaua tzichniel*, this woman (is) not thy servant.

In the Mixteca language such expressions have a peculiar arrangement. The adjective must precede the substantive, or rather the predicate must precede the subject, as in the reverse case the words are understood separately, and are not connected into a sentence: *quadza ñaha*, the woman is bad; *ñaha quadza*, the bad woman.

In the language of the Mbayas, a sentence can be made with any verb by dropping the verbal affixes, by transposing a letter characterizing the nouns as such, appending an adjective suffix, and uniting this with an independent pronoun. The grammars of this language call this form a passive, but it is just as much a neuter, and is not a verb but a phrase. From *iigaichini*, to teach, we have *n-iigaichin-igi*, taught, and as first person *e n-iigaichin-igi*, I am taught. The initial *n* which accompanies all nouns in this language, is merely the possessive pronoun of the third person, added according to the usage of many of these tongues to leave no noun without a possessive; the termination *igi* is a particle which indicates the place where anything remains. Literally, therefore, *eniigaichinigi* means, I (am) the stopping-place of his teaching, *i. e.*, one who is taught. All affixes of mode and tense, however, may be united to this phrase, so that thus it approaches a verb.

Regarded apart from the changes through tenses and modes, the union of the subject and predicate with the substantive verb omitted, is admirably adapted to express the conjunction of two words in one idea, and as the languages which make use of it also possess the ordinary forms of conjugation, they thus possess a special expression for both the forms of verbs above referred to. We shall note this particularly in the Beto language.

When the subject is not an independent part of speech, but an affixed pronoun, the analogy of this method of notation to a verbal form increases. For this is present even when no characteristic of a tense is added, simply by the union of an attribute and a pronoun. It should be remarked once for all, however, that too much weight must not be attached to whether these elements form one word or not, as this is not an infallible criterion.

The verb cannot be considered to be present as a separate part of speech, when a verb can thus be made out of any word, not merely those stamped as verbs, but also out of those which bear the express characteristics of nouns; and therefore I include all these cases in the class under consideration. For in all these languages there is in fact no verb, but only separate elements of speech with the verb omitted. Such cases are, however, interesting, as showing the gradual approach to the verb, and the effort of the instinct of language to arrive at grammatical form.

The independent personal pronoun rarely makes an element of verbal form, as in speaking it is generally worn down to an affix. When it is used to form a verbal expression, the difference of the elements is apparent. Thus, in the Carib, *ana¹iaca puin au¹*—I¹ (am) not a divider. In that tongue, however, this placement is not applicable to every noun, but only after certain definite verbal forms, especially in negative expressions.

The Lule language confines this notation to participials, and expresses by it the condition of the action and also its time; *mi¹ quis ama¹iciton¹*, you (are) me loving.

The affixed pronouns are either special, confined to these expressions, or if elsewhere in the tongue, are not employed with verbs, or not in this manner; or they are the pronominal affixes of the verb itself.

The Maya or Yucatecan language has a special pronoun which added to any noun forms a sentence with it, and possesses the power to add the idea of the verb; *Pedro en*, I am Pedro. But when it stands alone, without a predicate, it loses this power, as *en* alone does not mean, "I am."

In the Beto language there is, indeed, no special pronoun of this kind, as the one used is also a possessive. Its position, however, makes the difference. When it is prefixed, it is the possessive, but when suffixed it carries with it the power of the verb: *humani rru*, man I (am); *fofei rru*, bad I (am). In a similar manner this tongue forms a substantive verb, *ajoi rru*. The meaning of the root is not given, but it seems to mean something present, at hand. It is suggestive that in these phrases the accent is always on the pronoun, as if to signify that that is the important element.

It is very common in American languages to find the noun and the verb using the same pronouns, with the former to indicate possession, with the latter the subject. This might be explained by supposing that the action is regarded as the possession of the agent. But it is simpler to suppose that in each case the connection of the person with the noun and the verb is in the thoughts, and this relation is recognized in expression.

In this way the Mbaya language has a sort of descriptive conjugation;

connecting the participles with possessive pronouns; *i-iligodi*, I (am) explaining; but no doubt less definitely, "my explaining," "I to explain."

The language of the Abipones slightly alters the possessive pronouns in some persons and uses them in a similar manner: *ri-aal*, I am lazy; *yo-amkata*, he is good.

When the verbal pronoun is used in such expressions, it is entirely identical with the verb.

This is the case with the Mexican, where the verbal pronoun united to the participle forms a sentence: *ni-tlaçotlani*, I (am) a lover. This expression differs from the present indicative only in the form of the root-word, *ni-tlaçotla*; but it cannot form another tense or mode. The grammarians call such an expression a tense indicating habit. This, however, would not be a tense but a mode, and, in fact, the term rests on a misunderstanding. That such expressions indicate habit is shown by the fact that they do not apply, like the present of the verb, to the temporary action, but convey that it is a custom, or a business; not that I am loving just now, but that I am habitually a lover.

An entirely similar instance occurs in the North Guaranay language, which also permits, besides the regular conjugation, a union of the root of the verb with a pronoun, the verb being omitted. The grammarians of that tongue say that this adds extension and emphasis to the sense of the verb. The real difference, however, is that this procedure treats the verb as a noun, and the extension comes from considering the action expressed by the verb to have become a permanent quality; *a poro iuca*, I kill men (ordinary conjugation); *xe poro iuca*, I (am) a man-killer (form with the possessive pronoun); I kill men as my business.

In both these languages, therefore, what have been represented as peculiar and separated forms, tenses indicating habit, or forms of extension, are simply erroneous explanations of quite simple constructions. In Mexican the correctness of this explanation is confirmed by the forms of the vocative, which are identical with this supposed tense, *in ti tlatlacoani*, O thou sinner; literally, thou who (art) a sinner.

In the above examples the verbal power lies in the pronouns. But the Mbaya language constructs verbal sentences by adding the sign of the future to any adjective without a pronoun. This sign is *de*, or before a vowel *d*: *de liidi*, it will be pleasant to the taste; *d otiya*, he will be fat. I do not find other examples, and am uncertain whether other tenses and modes are thus formed. In that case the pronouns would have to be added, and the expression would lose its peculiarity, which is that the tense sign alone carries with it the notion of Being.

The Othomi language makes use in such expressions not only of the pronouns but of all the affixes of the verb, and conjugates a noun together with its article, treating it as a verbal radical: *qui-no-munti-*

maha, Thou wert the enriched. Here *no-munti* is "the enriched," and all the remaining syllables are verbal inflections. Sandoval, who wrote a grammar of the language, explains *no* as an auxiliary verb; but with the noun he calls it an article, as it is, and he evidently misunderstood the expression. It is wholly a verbal, but as this procedure can be applied to any noun whatever, such an expression is far removed from a real, well-defined verbal form.

The same language has another peculiar form with the possessive, which can only be explained by supplying an omitted verb. *Na nuhti* means "my property;" but if to this is added the abbreviated pronoun used as a verbal affix, *na-nuhti-gā*, the words mean, "this property belongs to me," or, "my property is it, mine."

In the grammatically obscure consciousness of these people, the ideas of verbal and merely pronominal expression are confounded, as also in the Brazilian language, where "my father" and "I have a father" are expressed by the same word.

The advantages which these languages derive from the formation of sentences with the verb omitted are two.

They can change any noun into a verb, or at least they can treat it as such. It is true that this can also be done by a substantive verb when one is found, but as the languages in question unite the noun to the verbal flexions, their freedom is much greater.

The second advantage is, that when it is desirable to discriminate clearly between the two kinds of verbs, the one which has at base an energetic attribute, the other which merely expresses the relation of predicate to subject, a thing to its qualities, this end can be much better reached by the process described than even by the substantive verb, which, by its full verbal form, always recalls the action of an energetic attribute.

Many of the languages named include in these expressions particles of time, thereby obscuring the distinction referred to. But in others this is not the case. Thus in the Maya and Beto there are two conjugations, one with the pronoun without time particles, and one with them; and as in both these tongues the present of the true conjugation has a characteristic tense sign, a separate aorist of the present is formed by the other conjugation, which our cultivated tongues cannot express so conveniently.

2. *When the notion of Being is expressed by a special word, but without a phonetic radical.*

Although the assumption here expressed sounds at first rather enigmatical, yet one can soon see that if the notion of Being is to be conveyed without a phonetic radical, it can only be done through the sign of the person, that is, in the pronoun, with or without a tense sign. This is actually the case in two languages, the Maya and the Yaruri.

We have already seen that in the Maya there is a special pronoun

which unites a predicate to the idea of person into one sentence. There is also another which by itself conveys the idea of the verb, and of which each person has the signification both of the pronoun and the substantive verb, "I" and "I am," "thou" and "thou art," etc. Not only is it so used in the present, but it can take the signs of the tenses. It is distinguished from the pronouns previously referred to in the first and second persons of both numbers only by a prefixed *t*, as follows :

	Pronouns which, with a predicate, convey a verbal idea.	Pronouns which, by themselves, possess verbal power.
Singular.		
1.	en	ten
2.	ech	tech
3.	lai lo	lai
Plural.		
1.	on	toon
2.	ex	teex
3.	ob	loob

This similarity leads to the thought that a true phonetic radical may exist in this *t*, and may induce us to consider this word not as a pronoun but as a substantive verb. But this makes no difference. The fact remains that the word is used both as a simple pronoun and also as a substantive verb. In the translation of the Lord's Prayer, the word *toon* is a simple pronoun. If *t* is a radical, it may just as well come from the pronoun. Some languages offer clear examples of this. In the Maipure the expression for the third person singular recurs with all the other persons, as if this sound meant the person, the man generally, and the first and second persons were denoted as the "I-person," "thou-person," etc. In the Achagua language the same radical occurs in all the pronouns, but does not, as in the Maipure, stand alone for the third person singular, but in it, as in the other persons, appears as an affix.

At any rate, this pronoun answers, in the Maya, all the purposes of the substantive verb, and there is no other in the language.

It is quite intelligible that in the conceptions of rude nations the idea of an object, and especially of a person, cannot be separated from the idea of his existence. This may be applied to the forms of expression above mentioned. What seems a violent and ungrammatical omission of the verb, is probably in those people an obscure association of thoughts, a non-separation of the object from its being. Probably it is from the same source that in some American languages every adjective is so considered that it includes not the idea alone, but the expression, "it is thus, and thus constituted."

In the Yaruri language the absence of a phonetic radical meaning "to be" is yet more apparent. Each person of the pronoun is a different word, and they have no single letter in common. The pronoun

which has verbal power is almost identical with the independent personal pronoun. The tense signs are prefixed to it. Thus, *que*, I am; *ri que*, I was, &c. This *ri*, however, is merely a particle which expresses that something is remote, and corresponds with our "from." *Ui-ri-di*, there was water there, literally "water far is" (from us is). The subjunctive of this substantive verb is given as *ri*, "if I were." This means, however, "in," and is a particle. The notion of Being is added, as in the pronoun; and the ideas, "in the being," and "if I were," pass into each other.

Strictly speaking, both the verbal notations here expressed are identical with those already mentioned. Here also the verb is supplied by the mind. The difference is that in the latter case the pronouns alone signify being, and contain this notion in themselves, whereas in the other cases this notion arises from the conjunction of subject and predicate. Then also in the Maya language there is a special pronoun for this sole purpose. As far as the forms go, they entirely resemble those of a true verb, and if *que* and *ten* are regarded as mere verbs substantive, one who did not examine their elements would take them to be true verbs like the Sanscrit *bhū*, the Greek *εἶμι*, and the Latin *sum*. The example of these languages thus teaches that in the analysis of the substantive verbs of other tongues it is not necessary that a common phonic radical need be employed.

In the Huasteca language the substantive verb is replaced by affixing a tense sign to the independent pronouns; *naua itz*, I was, *tata itz*, thou wert, &c. But the case is not the same. The pronoun receives the verbal power by the suffix *itz*, and this appears only in later times to have become a sign of the preterit, and in an earlier period to have had a general sense. The mountaineers who seem to have retained the older forms of the tongue use the *itz*, not only in the preterit, but in the present and future. It was doubtless the expression of some general verbal idea, as, to be, to do, &c.

II.

THE NOTION OF BEING IS INCORPORATED WITH THE VERB AS AN AUXILIARY.

Auxiliary verbs are used only for certain tenses, or form the entire conjugation. The former arises from accidental causes having relation only to these tenses, not to the verb in general. The latter readily arises when a substantive verb offers an easy means of conjugation by uniting with another verb. Sometimes the conjugation by means of an auxiliary shows that the linguistic sense of a notion sought something beyond the person and tense signs to express the verbal power itself, and therefore had recourse to a general verb. This can, indeed, only be constituted of those elements and a radical; but the want in the language is thus supplied, once for all, and does not return with every verb.

An excellent example of this is furnished by the Maya conjugation. In an analysis of it we find an element that neither belongs to the root, nor is a person, tense or mode sign, and when their varieties and changes are compared, there is evident throughout a marked anxiety to express the peculiar verbal power in the form of the verb.

The conjugation in the Maya language is formed by affixing the pronouns and mode and tense signs to the stem. The pronoun is, according to a distinction to be noted hereafter, either the possessive pronoun or that one which, without verbal power in itself, yet receives it when a predicate is attached to it to form a sentence.

Besides this, the suffix *cah* accompanies all verbs in the present and imperfect; and the suffix *ah* accompanies all transitive verbs through the remaining tenses, except the future. Present, 1st person, sing., *canan-in-cah*, I guard; imperf. 1st pers. sing., *canan-in cah cuchi*; perf., 1st pers. sing., *in canan-t-ah*. *In* is the possessive pronoun, *cuchi* the sign of the imperfect, *t* in the perfect is a euphonic letter.

The idea of transitive verbs is here taken somewhat narrower than usual. Only those are included which govern a word outside of themselves. All others are considered intransitive, even those which of themselves are active, but either have no expressed object (as, I love, I hate, etc.), or the word which they govern is in the verb itself, as in the Greek *οικοδομεω*, *οικουρω*. As these can govern a second accusative, the object incorporated in the verb is included in the idea they express.

The tenses of the intransitive verbs, except the present and imperfect, while they drop *ah* and the possessive pronoun, are formed with that pronoun which forms sentences with a predicate.

There are cases where not only the present omits *cah*, but where the stem, if it ends in *ah* as is often the case, drops it, and substitutes *ic*. The signification then alters, and indicates an habitual action or quality. As *ic* is the sign of the gerund, this change appears to be the transformation of the verb into a verbal, and to effect this, it must be united to that pronoun which serves as the substantive verb; *ten yacunic*, I love, properly, I am loving (habitually).

What *cah* and *ah* mean by themselves, we are not informed. Where *cah* is attached to the stem of some verbs it signifies intensity. *Ah* is as a prefix the sign of the male sex, of the inhabitant of a place, and of names derived from active verbs. Hence it seems to have meant at first person, man, and later to have become a pronoun, and finally an affix. It is noteworthy that the same difference exists between *ah* and *cah*, as between *en* and *ten*. The *c* may therefore be a radical sound. In the conjugation, *cah* is treated wholly as a verb. For in this the possessive pronoun is always prefixed; and as in the present and imperfect it is placed after the stem of the verb and before *cah*, it is evident from the difference between the two forms *canan-in-cah* and *in-canant-ah*, that in the former *cah*, and in the latter *canan*, are regarded as the verbs. *Canan-in-cah* is precisely as the English "I do guard."

Cah is consequently a true auxiliary verb; *ten*, when it appears in conjunction with *en* must have the notion of Being understood: *ah* appears to be of similar nature, but as it appears only in the conjugation of transitive verbs, it is a verbal sign, and thus receives its verbal power. That *cah* and *ah* do really possess this power is evident from the fact that they are never used whenever either of the pronouns which are always associated with the notion of Being is present.

Except in the future of transitive verbs, there is no instance in the conjugation where the stem of the verb is not accompanied by one of these four syllables, all of which indicate Being, and all of which have the force of auxiliary verbs.

The future of transitive verbs not only does not take any of these syllables, but even rejects *ah* when it is the terminal syllable of the stem. In this case no other termination replaces it. On the contrary, all other verbs receive a new suffix in their future, varying as they are of one or many syllables. The nature of these suffixes has not been explained.

The definite results of this analysis are as follows:

1. The Maya language possesses in its conjugation, besides the inflection syllables of the persons and tenses, another element, which, except in the simple future of transitive verbs, distinctly carries with it the notion of Being; in the future of most verbs there is such an element, but of unknown origin, and it only fails in the future of one class of verbs.

2. This language displays an effort to express, besides the other purposes of the verb, particularly its synthetic power, which is all the more apparent as it uses different means in different cases, but all designed to accomplish the same purpose.

The Yauri language constructs the whole of its conjugation in a yet simpler manner by means of an auxiliary verb.

The union of the pronoun and the tense sign which, as we have already seen, forms the substantive verb, affixed to the stem, completes the inflections of the one and only conjugation of attributive verbs, except that the independent pronouns are prefixed. Neither the stem nor the auxiliary words suffer any changes, except the insertion of an *n* in one person. The union remains, however, a loose one, and when person and tense are manifest by the connection, the auxiliary verb is omitted. This happens in certain verbs ending in *pa*. These, contrary to the usual rule, change in the perfect this termination to *pea*, by which the tense is made apparent, and as the person is evident from the prefixed personal pronoun, the auxiliary can be dropped without danger of obscurity.

The formation of certain tenses by means of auxiliaries is also frequent in American languages.

An optative of this nature in the Lule language has already been mentioned.

In the Mixteca tongue the imperfect is thus formed from the present, which carries with it the personal sign, and the perfect without its personal sign, a proceeding which, however rude and awkward it may be, shows a just appreciation of the peculiarity of this past tense, which expresses an action as going on, and therefore present in past time. The expression of continuous action is placed first, "I sin," then this is more precisely defined by the mark of past time, "this was so;" *Yo-dzatevain-di-ni-cuvui*. *Yo* is the sign of the present, *ni* of the preterit, *di* is the pronoun; the other two words, *to sin* and *to be*: "I was sinning."

The sign of the present, *yo*, is probably an abbreviation of the verb *yodzo*, I stand upon or over something, and so there is a second auxiliary in the sentence. This may often be a means of discovering the origin of tense signs, as, especially in American tongues, tenses are often formed by the union of verbs, as also occurs in Sanscrit and Greek.

The Othomi distinguishes certain past tenses, which, however, are separated by other characteristics, by a prefixed *xa*, which is called the third person singular of a substantive verb. As these tenses are precisely those in which the action must be completed, the perfect, pluperfect and future perfect, not, however, the imperfect and past aorist, such a connection is very suitable. Of this verb we have only *xa*, and there is another substantive verb *gui*, which itself takes *oca* in its conjugation.

The Totonaca language unites the perfect, in the person spoken of, with the third person singular of the future of the substantive verb, to form a future perfect. This is no completed form, but only an awkward sequence of two verbs; *yc-paxquilh-na-huan*, literally, "I have loved, it will be," = "I shall have loved."

In similar manner the substantive verb is used to form a tense of the subjunctive.

The sign of both the perfects in this tongue is the syllable *nit*, and *niy* means "to die." It is not improbable that this affix is derived from this verb. Death and destruction are suitable ideas to express the past, and some languages employ negative particles as signs of the preterit. In the Tamanaca this is not exactly the case, but the negative particle *puni* added to a word which signifies an animate thing, intimates that it has died; *papa puni*, the deceased father, literally, "father not." In the Omagua tongue the same word signifies old, dead, and not present.

In the Maipure and Carib tongues the negative particles *ma* and *spa* are also the signs of the preterit. Bopp's suggestion that the Sanscrit augment was originally a privative finds support in this analogy. Yet I would not speak conclusively on this point, as probably that, the Greek augment *ε*, and the Mexican *o*, are only lengthened sounds, intended to represent concretely the length of the past time. At any rate one must regard the negation as an actual destruction, a "been, and no longer being," not as simply a negation of the present.

III.

THE NOTION OF BEING IS PRESENT IN THE VERBAL FORM ONLY
IN IDEA.

In this case the verb consists only of the stem, and the person, tense, and mode signs. The former are originally pronouns, the latter particles. Before they are worn down by use to mere affixes, the three following cases may arise:

1. That all three of these elements are equally separable and loosely connected.

2. That one of the two, the person or the tense and mode signs, obtains a closer connection with the stem, and becomes formal, while the other remains loosely attached.

3. That both these are incorporated with the stem, and the whole approaches a true grammatical form, although it does not fully represent it.

Case 1st.

The only language I can instance here is that of the Omaguas, as I know no other with such a decided absence of all true grammatical forms in the verb. The independent pronouns, the stem words of the verbs, and the particles of tense and mode are merely placed together without any change, without internal connection, and apparently without fixed order; *usu*, to go; 1st pers. sing. pres. *ta usu*; 2d pers. sing. perf. *avi ene usu* (*ene* is the pronoun, *avi* the sign of the perfect). Subjunctive, 1st pers. sing. pres. *ta usu mia*; 2d pers. sing. perf. *avi epe usu mia*.

Sometimes, when a misunderstanding is not feared, the verbal stem is employed without these qualifying particles, and cannot then be distinguished from a noun. *Paolo amai amano*. The last word means "to die," but grammatically the sentence can as well be rendered, "Paul only die" (*i. e.* has died), as "Paul only dead."

It is true that the suffix *ta* changes nouns to verbs: *zhiru*, clothes, *zhiru-ta*, to clothe; but it also changes verbs to nouns, *yasai*, to cover, *yasai-ta*, a cover. This may be explained by the theory that this suffix conveys the idea to *make*, which is taken sometimes actively, sometimes passively.

According to the above, the Omagua conjugation falls in the class where an attributive is united to a pronoun and the verb is omitted; only that here definite tense syllables appear, and this brings the construction nearer to the idea of a conjugation.

Case 2d.

1. The Maipure, Abipone, Mbaya and Mocobi languages place only the personal sign in intimate connection with the verb, and allow the tense and mode signs to be loosely attached. They have therefore but one type of personal forms to be applied in every tense and mode by

means of the particles or the affixes formed from them. This type, taken alone, usually forms the present; but, accurately speaking, this name cannot be assigned it; because the signs of the other tenses are also dropped when this can be done without obscurity. *Ya-chaguani-me-yaladi*. Here the first word is in the indefinite form, though it is not the present but the perfect. The *me* is really the preposition "in;" but usage has adopted it for the subjunctive sign, and so the Spanish grammarians call it; or rather, the verb is considered to be introduced by a conjunction, "if," "as," so that it is usually not in the present but a past tense. If this is the case with the last verb, the first one must have the same tense, and so the whole phrase, without any tense sign, means, "I had helped him when I said it."

One would scarcely expect to find anything like this in cultivated languages. Yet it does occur in both Sanscrit and Greek. The now meaningless particle *sma* in Sanscrit when it follows the present changes it into a past, and in Greek *av* alters the indicative into a subjunctive.

To form this general type, the Maipure makes use of the unchanged possessive pronoun, and treats nouns and verbs in the same manner. The noun must always be united to a possessive pronoun, a trait common to all the Orinoco tongues and many other American languages. In the 3d person sing., however, neither the verb nor the noun has such a pronoun, but it is to be understood; *nuani*, my son; *ani*, alone, not son, but "his son." The 3d pers. sing. of the verb is often the mere stem, without a personal sign, but that this peculiarity should also extend to the noun I have met only in this tongue. It is evident that a pronoun is considered as essential to a noun as to a verb, and although a similar usage is found in many tongues, yet it appears in none so binding. There are, indeed, some nouns which are free from the necessity of thinking them in connection with a person, but these have the suffix *ti*, which is dropped when the possessive pronoun is added; *java ti*, a hatchet, *nu java*, my hatchet. From this it is evident that *ti* does not belong to the stem, and is incompatible with the use of a possessive, hence it is the sign of the substantive, in its independent condition. The same occurs in Mexican, and the chief termination of substantives, *tlí*, is almost identical in sound with that in the Maipure.

In this respect the verbal, conjugated with the personal signs, differs nothing from the noun united to its possessive pronouns. Grammatically, the form first becomes a verbal one by the added particles of tense and mode. The signification of these can generally be clearly ascertained, and thus are united closely to the stem.

The particles which the language of the Abipones uses to form the general verbal type are quite different from the possessives. The tense and mode particles have elsewhere in the tongue independent meanings. Thus *kan*, the sign of the perfect, means a thing which has been, time that has past.

In the language of the Mocobis the personal signs consist merely in letters, prefixed and suffixed, and have no apparent relationship to the pronouns. By affixing these letters, phonetic changes take place so that the stem is combined with them into one form.

Among the tense signs, a prefixed *l* indicates a past time, a suffixed *o*, the future; but the others are independent particles, loosely attached to the stem.

I have already shown how the Mbaya language conjugates adjectives with the independent pronoun, and participles with the possessive pronoun. The signs used in the conjugation proper of the attributive verb, do not appear elsewhere in the tongue, and must have descended from an older period of its existence.

In the tense and mode signs it is easily perceived how descriptive phrases pass into true forms. For the imperfect and pluperfect the speaker can choose among a number of particles, all of which indicate past time. The modes have definite signs, but these are merely appended, and some have separate significations. The future and perfect have not merely fixed particles, but these are worn down to one letter, so that the stem is actually incorporated with them.

2. In the languages heretofore considered the personal signs added to the word make up the conjugation, and the other signs are attached loosely and externally. The reverse of this, though not perfectly so, appears in the Lule language. The tense and mode signs, often of but one letter, are immediately and firmly attached to the stem, and the pronouns are affixed to this to complete the conjugation. These pronouns are, however, the ordinary possessives, so that noun and verb become in a measure identical; thus, *came* means both "I eat" and "my food;" *cumuee*, "I marry" and "my wife;" only in a few examples are the verbal pronouns distinct from the possessives.

In this case, therefore, the personal signs are independent elements, occurring elsewhere in the language, while the tense and mode signs are true affixes.

The inflection-syllables form with the stem real verbal forms, and so far the conjugation of this language belongs to the third case. But each of the elements has its fixed position, and as soon as one has the key to the combination, he can recognize and separate them at once.

Reasons which it would require too much space to set forth render it probable that all the tense signs are really auxiliary verbs or come from them. This is evident of the optative, as has already been shown. The present only is simple, as it has no tense sign.

Slight differences are found between the personal signs of some tenses, so that these tenses can be distinguished by them, a trait usually seen only in tongues so far cultivated that the grammatical forms have undergone such changes as no longer to present simple and uniform combinations. Equally curious is the regular omission of the tense sign of past time in the third person plural only. Although, except in

this case and that of the present, each tense has its definite sign, inserted between the stem and the personal sign, yet there are, besides these, various particles expressing past time, which can accompany the usual tense form, so that there is a double sign of time, one in the word itself and one loosely attached to it.

The languages of the Mbayas, Abipones, Mocobis and Lules¹ are closely allied both in words and in some grammatical forms. It is all the more extraordinary, therefore, to find the last-mentioned pursuing a method in the structure of its verb which is almost totally opposed to that in the other three tongues.

Case 3d.

The languages of this class approach in their conjugations those of the more cultivated tongues, in which each verbal inflection has a fixed and independent form. Both the person, the tense and the mode signs are united to the stem, in such a manner that none of the three can be said to be either less or more loosely attached than the others.

All the conjugations about to be discussed lack, however, that fixity of form which grammatically satisfies the mind.

The elements are placed definitely and regularly one by the other, but are not incorporated into each other, and are therefore readily recognizable.

They are found, moreover, outside of the verb elsewhere in the language either without any change or with slight differences of sound; the personal signs as pronouns, the other affixes as particles.

The composition of the verb is separable, and may receive into itself other parts of speech.

No American language is free from these drawbacks to perfection of form in the conjugations. In some all three are found; in most the first and last. In really grammatically developed tongues, as in the Sanscrit, Greek, Latin and German, none of these imperfections exists. The verb includes in itself no part of its object, the affixes modifying the stem have lost all independent life, and the analysis of the formal elements becomes a difficult philological task, which often fails and only rarely can be fully proved.

I shall discriminate in regard to the conjugations about to be considered that which is an approach toward a fixed form from the intentional separation of the form to insert a governed word.

1. Approach toward a Fixed Form.

In the Mixteca language, the personal sign is the unchanged possessive pronoun. If the verb is governed by a noun in the third person, the possessive is dropped. It is left to the speaker to choose whether he designates the person, either by prefixing the personal pronoun or suffixing the possessive. The tense signs are prefixed syllables, but the

perfect and future signs are altogether different from those of the present, and materially alter the verbal stem.

The Beto language prefixes the personal signs and also the possessive pronouns to the nouns. As the latter are not fully known, we cannot judge of their identity with the verbal pronouns. The latter do not seem to differ much from the personal pronouns. The tense signs are easily recognized suffixes.

Another conjugation of the same language, by the suffixed pronoun without tense signs, and with the verb omitted, has been mentioned above (I, 1), as forming a substantive verb.

A second substantive verb arises from the conjugation above explained, with the tense signs.

These two forms may also be combined, and this illustrates with what superfluous fullness grammatical forms spring up even among rude nations. The conjugation with the tense sign is changed by a participial suffix into a verbal, and then the pronoun is suffixed, as in the conjugation without the tense sign. The latter, therefore, stands twice in the form. The pronoun used in the conjugation with tense signs may also be prefixed to a simple adjective, and the pronoun used in the conjugation without tense sign is suffixed to this, and the participial ending is then added. This is treated as a verb with the substantive verb understood. But sometimes the verb "to be" in the form without tense signs is added, and then the whole form contains the pronoun three times, without gaining thereby any additional meaning.

The Carib conjugation seems to have arisen from the forms of many dialects or epochs, and is therefore more complicated and formal, and less easy to analyze.

The personal signs are prefixed. In the substantive verb there are two classes, of which only one is also common to attributive verbs. The other indicates in the verb "to be" also the connection of persons with the infinitive and gerund, and is therefore of the nature of a possessive. It may also be that when it is combined with other tenses, the notion among these nations is altogether a substantial one, as we have already seen with the subjunctive.

The stem often receives the addition *r* or *ri*, the meaning of which is not known.

The structure of the Tamanaca conjugation also reveals a combination of at least two separate structures. Some tenses use as their personal signs entire pronouns, almost identical with the personals. Other tenses merely change the initial letter of the verb, while there is little similarity between these affixes and the pronouns. In the plural some of the persons insert a syllable between the verb and the tense sign.

The tense signs are suffixed, and consist merely of terminal letters or syllables, except two true particles, which distinguish the continued present from the present aorist.

There are an initial *y* and a *t* occasionally appearing in all persons, of which we can only say that they are not radicals.

The conjugation of this language, therefore, consists of elements not readily analyzed.

The Huasteca language prefixes the possessive pronouns as personal signs. It may also drop them, and use in their stead the independent pronouns; or may combine both; or may use abbreviated personals; so that there is a prevailing arbitrariness in this part of the verbal form.

The tense signs are usually suffixes; but in the future they are prefixes, which are incorporated with the personal sign placed between them and the stem. They consist of simple sounds, of no independent signification. But the particles of the imperative are so separable that when this mode is preceded by an adverb, they attach themselves to it.

The Othomi language does not make use of the possessive pronouns in the conjugation, but suffixes abbreviated forms of the personals, or else prefixes others of special form, but identical in many letters and syllables with the personals. In the present condition of the language the suffixes are used only with the substantive verb; in the attributive verb, however, they may have been driven forward by the governed pronouns suffixed. Every verbal inflection may also take, besides its pronominal prefix, also the unabridged personal pronoun in front, or the abbreviated one after it.

The tense signs consist principally of single vowels, by means of which the pronominal prefixes are attached to the stem. The imperfect and pluperfect alone have besides this a loosely attached particle. The past tenses possess a prefix, which we have already seen appears to have been derived from an auxiliary verb.

In the third person of some tenses in certain verbs the stem undergoes a change of its initial letters, which appears to transform these inflections into verbal adjectives, an instance of the confusion of the ideas of noun and verb common in all these languages.

The Mexican language possesses a peculiar class of verbal pronouns which form the personal signs. This pronoun is similar to the personal in its consonants, but has a vowel of its own. It is a prefix. The plural is marked by the accent, or by a special termination. This personal sign is inseparable from the verb, but the speaker may also prefix the independent personal pronoun.

The tense signs are all without signification, being single letters or syllables. The perfect is marked not so much by an affix, as by changing, the termination of the verb in various ways, but chiefly by shortening and strengthening the sound. All tense designations are placed at the end of the word, except the augment for past time. If by augment we mean a vowel sound prefixed to the verb in certain tenses in addition to their usual signs, then the Mexican is the only American language which possesses one.

The modes are designated by loosely attached particles, also by a different structure of the tenses, and in the second person a peculiar pronoun.

Thus the Mexican conjugation consists of true verbal forms, not of separate parts of speech of independent significance; but the elements of these forms are easily recognizable, and can be reached without difficulty.

The most difficult to analyze, and hence the most nearly approaching our conjugations, is that of the Totonaca language.

The personal signs differ from the pronouns. That of the 2d pers. sing. is not easily recognized, and several forms of it must be assumed. Its position as a prefix or suffix differs, and it is variously located with reference to the other verbal signs. Still more difficult is it to distinguish the tense signs. There are three different systems of prefixes and suffixes in the conjugation, and the plan on which these are combined with each other serves to distinguish the tense. But only a few of these affixes really appear to designate tense; of the others this may be suspected at best, and of others again it is improbable.

Thus there are verbal affixes which cannot be considered to designate either persons, modes or tenses.

The stem undergoes little change, but the attaching of the affixes to it renders it impossible to apply the same scheme to all verbs, and hence leads to a division of them into three conjugations.

Some tenses have two different forms, without any change in signification.

2. Divisibility of Verbal Forms to allow the insertion of governed parts of speech.

Of the Mixteca tongue it cannot exactly be said that it divides the essential parts of the verbal form to allow the insertion of the governed object. As a rule, the object is merely appended, and where it appears in the form itself, it is inserted between the stem and the suffixed pronoun. The latter is, however, no necessary part of the form, as it is dropped when the verb is governed by a noun, and can always be replaced by prefixing the indefinite pronoun.

Nor is it mentioned that the Beto language includes the object in the verb.

The Carib tongue unites the governed pronoun with the verbal form, and in some cases the personal sign is thus displaced. But here the object is not inserted in the middle, but is prefixed or suffixed.

Our information about the Tamanaca language discloses nothing on this point.

In the Huasteca, the governed pronoun separates sometimes the last, sometimes the first syllable of the inflectional form from the stem.

The Othomi merely attaches the governed words closely to the verbal form, in this resembling the Mixteca.

The Mexican language is that which has developed this peculiarity to the greatest degree. The governed noun is placed in the middle of the verb; or, if this is not done, a pronoun representing it is inserted.

If there are two objects, an accusative and a dative, then two corresponding pronouns are inserted ; and if no object is named, but the verb is of that class which is followed by an immediate or remote object, or both, then two indefinite pronouns appear in the verb. The Mexican verb therefore, expresses either a complete sentence, or else a complete scheme of one, which merely requires to be filled out. It says, in one word, "I give something to somebody," *nititlamaca*, and then defines what it is and to whom.

It follows necessarily that a part of the verbal form is fluctuating according to the sense and connection of the sentence, and that the governing pronoun stands sometimes immediately before the verb, and sometimes is separated from it by indefinite pronouns or even nouns.

In the Totonaca language, the prefixes and suffixes make room for the governed words between themselves and the stem.

This examination of the languages whose conjugations approach a fixed form, shows clearly that this fixedness is seriously shaken precisely where it is most important, through this insertion of the governed words.

Now if we reflect on the structure of the various verbal forms here analyzed, certain general conclusions are reached, which are calculated to throw light upon the whole organism of these languages.

The leading and governing part of speech in them is the Pronoun ; every subject of discourse is connected with the idea of Personality.

Noun and Verb are not separated ; they first become so through the pronouns attached to them.

The employment of the Pronoun is two-fold, one applying to the Noun, the second to the Verb. Both, however, convey the idea of belonging to a person ; in the noun appearing as Possession, in the verb as Energy. But it is on this point, on whether these ideas are confused and obscure, or whether they are defined and clear, that the grammatical perfection of a language depends. The just discrimination of the kinds of pronouns is therefore conclusive, and in this respect we must yield the decided pre-eminence to the Mexican.

It follows that the speaker must constantly make up his verbs, instead of using those already on hand ; and also that the structure of the verb must be identical throughout the language, that there must be only one conjugation, and that the verbs, except a few irregular ones, can possess no peculiarities.

This is different in the Greek, Latin and ancient Indian. In those tongues many verbs must be studied separately, as they have numerous exceptions, phonetic changes, deficiencies, etc., and in other respects carry with them a marked individuality.

The difference between these cultivated and those rude languages is chiefly merely one of time, and of the more or less fortunate mixture

of dialects; though it certainly also depends in a measure on the original mental powers of the nations.

Those whose languages we have here analyzed are, in speaking, constantly putting together elementary parts; they connect nothing firmly, because they follow the changing requirements of the moment, joining together only what these requirements demand, and often leave connected through habit, that which clear thinking would necessarily divide.

Hence no just division of words can arise, such as is demanded by accurate and appropriate thought, which requires that each word must have a fixed and certain content and a defined grammatical form, and as is also demanded by the highest phonetic laws.

Nations richly endowed in mind and sense will have an instinct for such correct divisions; the incessant moving to and fro of elementary parts of speech will be distasteful to them; they will seek true individuality in the words they use; therefore they will connect them firmly, they will not accumulate too much in one, and they will only leave that connected which is so in thought, and not merely in usage or habit.

Notes (by the translator) on the various American Tribes and Languages mentioned by Humboldt in the preceding Memoir.

Abipones.—A tribe formerly residing on the broad grassy plains known as *El Gran Chaco*, west of the Parana river and on the right bank of the Rio Vermejo. They are a nomadic, hunting people, and are related by language closely to the Mocos and Tobas, more remotely to the Mbayas. The Jesuit, Father Jose Brigniel, wrote an *Arte y Vocabulario de la Lengua Abipona*, which has not been published.

Achaguas.—A small tribe formerly living in Venezuela, between the Apure and Meta rivers. They are mentioned by Piedrahita as an intelligent people. Aristides Rojas says they are now extinct (*Estudios Indigenas*, p. 214. Caracas, 1878).

Beto.—Usually spelled *Betoi* or *Betoya*. They live on the upper waters of the Meta river in Colombia and are related to the Yaruris.

Caribs.—This widely extended stock occupied much of the northern coast of South America and had planted colonies on many of the Antilles. It is believed that they are distantly connected with the Tupis and Guaranis.

Guaranis.—The name of a number of affiliated tribes in Southern Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and the Argentine Republic. The Tupis of Brazil are a branch of the Guaranis.

Huastecas.—A northern colony of the great Maya stock of Yucatan, dwelling in the province of Tampico on the river Panuco. At the time of the discovery they were an important and cultured nation.

Lule.—One of the nations of *El Gran Chaco*, west of the Parana river. The *Arte y Vocabulario de la Lengua Lule y Tonocote*, by Father Antonio Machoni de Cerdeña (Madrid, 1732), was republished with a careful ethnographic introduction by J. M. Larsen, at Buenos Ayres, 1877.

Maipures.—Tribes of various dialects who live on both sides of the Orinoco river where it forms the boundary between Venezuela and New Granada, about 5° N. lat.

Mayas.—Natives of Yucatan, and the most highly developed of any of the American nations. Related dialects are spoken in Guatemala, in Tabasco, and by the Huastecas.

Mbayas.—A people of the *Gran Chaco* in the northern part of the Argentine Republic, and distantly related to the Abipones.

Mexican.—Otherwise called the Nahuatl or Aztec language. Spoken in the greatest purity in the valley of Mexico, it extended from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific, and along the latter from Sonora to Guatemala, with few interruptions.

Mixtecas.—A tribe speaking several dialects living in the State of Oaxaca, Mexico.

Mocobis.—One of the four principal nations who formerly occupied *El Gran Chaco*, west of the Parana river. By some the name is spelled *Mbocoby*.

Omaguas.—Once a nation of considerable extent and culture between the Marañon and the Orinoco.

Othomis.—A tribe resident near San Louis Potosi, Mexico, and neighboring parts. Their proper name is said to be *Hîâ-hiû*. Their language is monosyllabic and nasal.

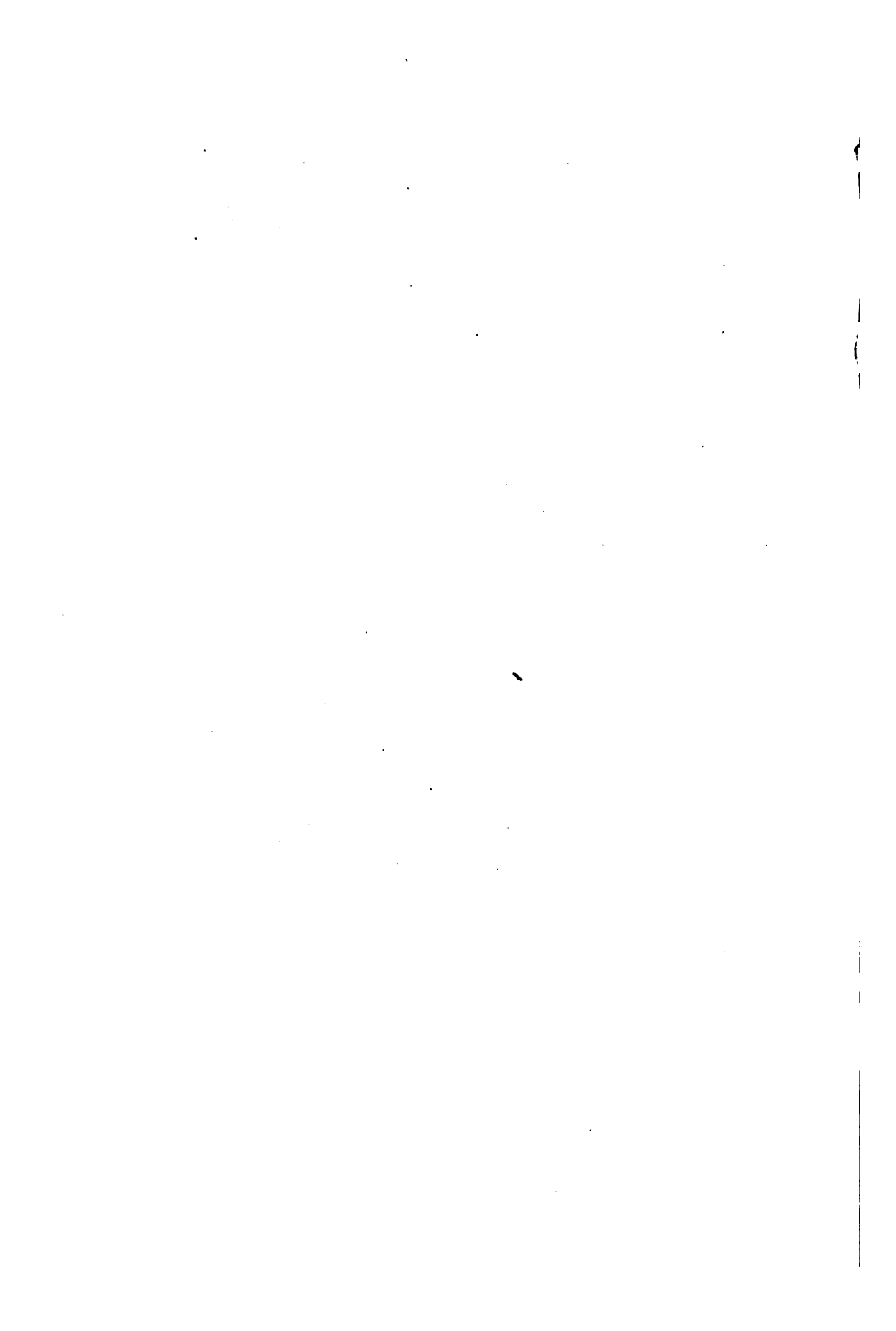
Tamanacas.—These dwell on the right bank of the Upper Orinoco, and are connected by dialect with the Carib stock on the one hand and the Guaranay on the other.

Totonacas.—A nation asserted by Pimentel to speak a mixed

language (Nahuatl and Maya) dwelling in the southern portion of the Province of Vera Cruz, Mexico, and parts adjacent.

Tupis.—The natives of the eastern area of Brazil, related to the Guaranis of the south and perhaps to the Caribs of the north. The *Lingoa Geral* of Brazil is a corrupt Tupi.

Yaruris.—Residents on the upper streams of the Meta river in New Granada, related to the Betoï.



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